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PRINCE SARONI'S WIFE

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PRINCE SARONI'S WIFE

AND OTHER STORIES

BY

JULIAN HAWTHORNE

AUTHOR OF 'SEBASTIAN STROME' 'GARTH' 'ELLICE QUENTIN' ETC.

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of the picturesque suggestiveness natural to an Italian. 'Saroni is as natural as a dog,' a friend of his once said of him, and it expressed very well a certain innocent animalism that characterised him. He was in such thorough good humour with his body and its senses—he so enjoyed their services and companionship—and he uniformly alluded to that enjoyment with such ingenuousness and simplicity, that we sometimes found ourselves wondering how it was that we had forgotten to be scandalised. But the fact was, Saroni was what is termed a privileged person, and he was privileged by nature, still more than by rank and position. Everybody liked him (except the few who, like Mrs. Fulvia, conceived an involuntary aversion for him at first sight), and everybody was content that he should behave like himself and not like other people. Of course it must not be inferred from this that Saroni was a boor or a fool. He was a gentleman and an aristocrat; his social position was complete; he was never awkward and never dull. Nevertheless, underneath that refined surface, not interfering with it, but contriving to exist in superficial harmony with it, you might always discern the unconventional, unsophisticated, spontaneous animal; thoroughly at home and comfortable in its human cage, and able to fulfil all its instincts, without so much as rubbing against its barriers.

But perhaps I am giving prominence to an aspect of Saroni's character which was not in

reality the predominant one. He came to London as an attaché of the Italian Embassy; it was a post of honour rather than of emolument or diplomatic complexity; and to Saroni it practically meant an introduction under the best auspices to the best of London Society. He fully availed himself of his opportunities, and pleased himself immensely with everything. The amount of downright hard work he could get through in the course of a London season was surprising; nothing could make him feel blasé, or dull the freshness and poignancy of his satisfactions. It was a curious and, perhaps, anomalous spectacle—that of a man essentially so close to the primitive creature, expanding himself without stint or uneasiness in one of the most stolidly artificial societies in the world. But Saroni seemed always not so much to accommodate himself to circumstances as to accommodate circumstances to himself. I apprehend, moreover, that what was so luxuriant in him was present, in at least germinal form, in much more conventional people; so that he may have found in secret or intuitive sympathies all the response that was necessary to his spiritual composure.

There was in Saroni, apart from or outside of his social and emotional man, a subtle and sagacious intellect. He sometimes darted a look at you, so penetrating and comprehensive that, if it had not been for the laughing roguishness of expression that accompanied it, you would have felt yourself uncomfortably trans-

parent. He was capable of rapid and complicated mental operations; of making instant but singularly acute estimates of motives and characters; of taking bold and confident action on data which would only have made a less finely organised man hesitate. He possessed also the power of continuous application or attention, insomuch that he could think out an abstruse or involved subject, hour in and hour out, until he had completely resolved and mastered it. I used to fancy—and I was not alone in my opinion—that Saroni would have been all the better, both on his own account and on that of his friends, if he had lacked this vigorous intellectual gift. It did not altogether fall in with our general conception of his character, and, besides, it was the only trait about him which was not entirely amiable. It was difficult to imagine the prince doing anything wicked; but if he ever should have that misfortune, it was evident to his friends that the evil council would proceed from his brain and not from his heart. To do him justice, however, he seldom obtruded his brains upon anybody, and one might easily have been acquainted with him for a long time without ever being startled or inconvenienced by them.

This is all that it seems worth while to say at present about the personal character and manifestations of Prince Saroni. He was a zealous and, upon the whole, a rather unsuccessful gambler; but that was no more than might have been expected of a man of his temperament.

CHAPTER II.

ONE evening in August, Prince Saroni walked over from his lodgings near Piccadilly to Waterloo Station, and took the train thence to Richmond. Arrived there, he got out, passed through the town, crossed the bridge, and proceeded in a south-westerly direction for about half a mile.

It was a still hazy evening, and the harvest moon was rising. From a church somewhere in the town the clock struck nine. Saroni turned aside from the road along which he was travelling, and followed a narrow lane which was overshadowed on each side by short elm trees. In about two minutes he paused opposite a gate, beyond which an avenue led up to a small villa. He sat down on a stone post beside this gate, took out his cigarette case and lighted a cigarette, and then, folding his arms, he gazed at the dim moon and smoked. After a while he rose to his feet, and looked eagerly over the gate up the avenue. A darkly-clad figure came with a light step over the gravel, and having passed through the gate, turned to him and put both hands in his. He drew the figure towards him, threw his arms round it, and kissed it on both cheeks and on the mouth.

'Do you love me as much as ever?' inquired a low woman's voice.

'As ever? I love you ten times!' was the reply. 'Are not you Ethel and I am Saroni?'

'There are many other Ethels in London more lovable than I am.'

'I do not know them! They perhaps are lovable by others, but not by me. I find all myself in you. When I am with you, then only I am not alone.'

The girl rested her hands on his shoulders and looked intently into his eyes. As revealed by the moonlight, her countenance showed a type of beauty at once serious and spirited. There was power in her dark level brow, and in the putting together of her full but resolute lips. Her face was rather long, and appeared nearly colourless; but most faces appear so when shone upon by the moon. Her dark brown hair was drawn back from her forehead, and massed in a coil behind. So far the expression of the features was of gravity and steadfastness; but in the wide and sensitive nostrils, in a certain kindling and dilatation of the eyes, and in an occasional defiant movement of the corners of the mouth, was discernible a haughty and passionate spirit. Her figure was of the middle height, deep-bosomed, round-armed, and justly proportioned. She was a woman well worth loving and being loved by; but the man who would venture to deceive or wrong her might make up his mind to nothing less than tragedy.

'I am a fool to be here,' she said after a pause, dropping her hands, 'and a great fool to

love you as much as I do. Can you tell me what makes me do it?'

'I? I have never thought,' answered Saroni, caressing her arms and meeting her gaze smilingly. 'It is glorious to love, I think. I have always not known what I was meant to do, and I wondered; but so soon as I saw you, I knew that I was meant to love you. It makes me happy and strong here!' he struck his breast, and smiled again. 'To me it seems the fools are the ones who do not love.'

'Have you never loved anyone before me?'

'I once thought yes,' said Saroni, musing, 'but that was before we loved. Those other loves are a trouble; it was that I loved myself, not them; so, after they had helped me to love myself, then I was fatigued and wanted them to go away. But you make me go out from myself, and the more I go out, the stronger I am to go. I love you for ever!'

'Let us walk down the lane a little,' said the girl. 'My father thinks I have gone to my room, and if he should come out . . . . Yes, I am a fool, but I don't care. I have tried wisdom, and found no pleasure in it. Some people, I suppose, do not need to be foolish in order to be happy, but I am not one of them. The world has gone hard with me ever since I can remember. No matter! 'I don't care—now!'

She spoke the last word with infinite tenderness. They were walking slowly down the dark lane; Saroni's arm was flung about her

shoulders. She stopped, and slowly disengaging herself, faced him. 'You have taken me beyond my own help,' she said, with a tremor in her voice. 'Oh! this love! it makes me helpless. I would do or be anything in the world for you. I don't understand how it can be so with me. Father has told me so often that I never should care for anyone, that I believed him. He thinks so still, I suppose!' She laughed a little, and paused. 'Even now,' she went on, 'I sometimes tell myself you cannot deserve it all. I don't flatter myself that you are altogether good. You may be all evil, for what I know. It makes no difference, though. I should love you just the same if I knew you were wicked—I should love your wickedness! Father is a good man, and I don't love him. What are his books and his sermons to me? I didn't make good and evil, and I am not obliged to order my love according to another's rule. Evil may be my good, if I choose—it is a question of words. Well, you see what a fool I am.'

Saroni could do many things which, in another man, would have seemed extravagant and absurd. He knelt down on the grassy pathway at Ethel's feet, took her hands, and pressed them against his cheeks.

'You are my Madonna,' he said passionately. 'I say my prayers to you. I have no heaven above you. You step on my heart: you live in my soul. To touch you makes me a king: to kiss you makes me immortal! If you were

thirsty I would give you my blood to drink. I do not find it dark when you are with me, for then the eyes of my love are opened. Darling, give me your lips!'

She stooped, sighing with delight.

They walked on in silence, and, emerging from the lane, crossed the road, and the meadow beyond. By-and-by they came to the brink of the river.

'This is where we first met,' said Ethel. 'You upset your boat against that snag, and came floundering ashore here where I was sitting. What a wet wild creature you looked! What a little while ago that was—not more than six weeks! It was in the last days of June; and I have seen you—eight times since then! Eight hours! how can such a moment change one's whole long weary life?'

'It is like death, which changes all in a moment,' said Saroni musingly.

'Yes, it is like death,' assented Ethel. 'And like death, it opens a new life that is passed in heaven—or in hell! Which will it be for us, I wonder!'

'I do not fear; I am content,' said the Italian, folding his arms and gazing into the black stream. 'Love must be always love, even in hell.'

'But how will our love end?' pursued the girl, passing her arm beneath his, and leaning her head on his shoulder.

'What do you mean by "end"?' demanded Saroni quickly.

'I mean, when it becomes misery, as it will when we are parted. We shall be parted. I have no money and no rank. My father is a poor dissenting minister. You are a prince, and I don't know what beside—and a Roman Catholic. You cannot marry me.'

'I did not make myself a prince or a Roman Catholic,' said Saroni; 'but I became your lover; and whatever I am else is only so much more to lay at your beloved feet. As long as you and I are man and woman, we are married; and if, in some church, before some priest, I had married another woman, you would still be my wife, and not she.'

'Saroni, are you asking me to become your mistress?' inquired Ethel, in a very quiet voice.

'My mistress? No!' exclaimed he, with a vigorous gesture of aversion. 'That is not a word for you. You are my ——'

'Wait a moment. I love you with my whole heart: it is the only thing my heart has ever done. I have lived to myself until lately, and thought my own thoughts; and I don't pretend to believe all the superstitions and tyranny that are called religion. If you and I were equals, Saroni—if you had no more to lose before the world than I have—I would come to you freely; I shouldn't care for any security greater than your love, because no security would be worth anything to me if that were gone. Oh, that would be sweet!'

She murmured these last words abstractedly, still clasping Saroni's arm, and pressing her

cheek against his shoulder. He looked down at her curiously, squeezing his beard in his hand. He could perceive that it was a moment of exalted emotion with her, and he knew enough of her to know that it was impossible to foretell what the next moment would bring forth.

At first she did not seem to intend saying anything more. She lingered over her last thoughts, as if loth to deal with others. But at length, separating herself from the Italian, and standing alone upon the margin at a little distance from him, she raised her eyes and said—

'But do not make me jealous!'

Saroni gave a short remonstrative laugh, throwing out his arms and slanting his head to one side. 'There could be no one for whom to be jealous but yourself,' he exclaimed.

'It would not be enough that you should love no one else,' continued Ethel, beginning to breathe faster. 'The touch of another woman's hand on yours would be poison to me. I don't build my honour, as other women do, on a ceremony or a dogma. To be married before a priest is nothing to me, if that which makes the marriage real is kept back. But I have an honour of my own, and that no one shall tamper with. I would follow you on my knees round the world; but I would rather see you dead, and die myself, than find that you had deceived me, or shared a word or a thought that has passed between us with any other

woman. Are you true?' she suddenly and breathlessly demanded, stepping nearer and gazing at him through the gloom. 'If we are ever to part, tell me now, and let us part here.'

'And if we were to part, where would you go?' asked the Italian.

'I would go home to my father, and copy out his sermons, and darn his stockings, and listen to his scoldings, and be respectable and peaceful. . . . I would go underneath that water: and you should see my drowned face before your eyes the rest of your life!' These sentences were uttered with fierce excitement. Saroni had been watching her keenly while she spoke, with that peculiar astute expression which has been already alluded to. So far as could be judged in the darkness, he did not seem discomposed or depressed by her words; they appeared to give him pleasure and encouragement. He tossed back his head and stamped his foot, as if finally taking some resolution. Then he grasped her hands impulsively and lifted them together to his lips.

'Yes, you are the woman that I thought, that I need,' he said confidently and emphatically. 'Now I know that you are as strong and brave as you are beautiful and lovely. If you were opposed of some obstacle, some enemy, you would crush it, or you would die. I am of that spirit also. My right to live as I will is as great as the right of the world to prevent me. A crime is not what the one man does to free himself, but it is what society does

to oppress him. Now you shall read in my soul. I shall give up to you everything. I shall trust you in such things that you shall never find it possible to have distrust of me: for it will give you power over me that you can never lose, as long as you have life. Come, and listen!'

They turned away from the river and walked slowly back across the meadow. The belated waterman, who had been lying in his skiff beneath the shadow of the bushes, could perceive that the foreign gentleman was talking very rapidly and earnestly, and that the young lady seemed a good deal taken aback. And that was the last he heard of them. But an hour later, Ethel Moore was lying face downward on her bed, with fingers clutching the pillow, and a wild tumult in her heart; and Prince Saroni was playing cards at his club, and already losing heavily.

CHAPTER III.

About the middle of August, just when everybody was well-started on their usual summer migration, it became known that Prince Saroni was going to be married. The news was unexpected in itself, but that it should be taking place in the absence, as it were, of any witnesses, was generally held to be a failure in social courtesy. There was not one of us who

there'll be nobody in town to see you turned off.'

'Well, now I shall tell you about it,' he exclaimed, all at once swinging himself to a sitting posture, and rubbing his hands through his hair. 'There has been no one to talk to all the time, and I am tired of keeping so much to myself. Will it be tiresome to you? Take more punch!'

'The punch is good, but your story will be better. Out with it!'

'Humph! I suppose it is the same as often happens,' remarked Saroni, with his elbows on his knees and his shoulders up to his ears. 'It is an affair——arranged! you understand. The lady thinks it will be nice to be a princess; and I think—well, I think I have very badly played cards this summer, that is all. We buy each other: it is that! And since she did not make her money any more than I make my rank, so we both cost each other nothing, except the trouble of living together: that is all there is of it!'

This unprecedented frank confession amused me greatly; it was not only comic in itself, but it was quite in accord with Saroni's unique character. The social institution of matrimony must, of course, to this primitive creature, seem a ponderous nuisance. Love, to a man like him, should be nothing more ceremonious than the pairing of doves or deer; a sort of annual excursion, to be repeated with variations.

'So I am not very sad if there will not be

many people at the church,' concluded Saroni, getting up from the sofa and giving himself a thorough stretching.

'I don't remember having heard the name of the lady as it was given in the *Post*,' remarked I. 'Is she a native of London?'

'I have never asked her. She has been since six or seven years in a French convent, to be made wise and charming. She is twenty-one years old, and has brown hair and eyes, and a face smooth and pale. Her name is Miss Medwin, and she has twenty thousand a year. That is all that I know of Mademoiselle my fiancée.'

'But you have not told me,' I ventured to interpose, 'how much you are in love with her.'

'My dear,' said the prince, 'it is a thing I do not ask myself. It is not of the bargain. How otherwise? I have seen her five or six times, always with Signora the mamma of the company. We talk of the weather, of France, of Italy; I make my salute and I depart. To think of love would be to defame the proprieties of the matrimonial state. It is a thing we pass over.'

'You will come to it soon enough afterwards,' I affirmed, optimistically.

Saroni thrust his hands in his pocket, and lounged up and down the room. 'There is one thing that makes it unlikely,' he said, after a while. 'I love another lady.'

'This will never do!' returned I, with severity.

'Eh! it is done. It is the fate of this

civilisation of ours. It is not enough that you live with the lady you do not like; you must also not live with the lady you love. If I had not come to know Miss Ethel Moore, I could have been comfortable to be dull with Miss Medwin. You see, I reserve nothing from you. Why should I? The worst is that it is so?'

'But surely, if your happiness really depends on it, you can marry Miss Moore as easily as Miss Medwin. I presume there is not much to choose between the families?'

'My dear, there are two things. Miss Medwin has twenty thousand a year of property unencumbered; Miss Moore has nothing but herself—who is more lovely and precious than all the gold in the world, but who cannot pay the hundred debts that I have made since I am living in this your charming London. Would you know how much I must pay?—it is fifty thousand pounds, and that is after I have paid away all there was of my own. The second thing is that, if I marry with anyone who is not a good Catholic, my inheritance is forfeit, and my younger brother succeeds me. He is a good boy, but I do not want that. The way is so!'

'And what does Miss Moore say to all this?' I demanded, after some reflection.

The prince halted in his walk, and shook his head gloomily. 'To tell her shall be the last thing. She is proud and fierce, and she loves me with all her might. She has

told me once, "If you deceive me, I go in the water, and my face that is drowned shall meet you always!" Because of all that I am unhappy. I think sometimes it would be better to use this.'

As he spoke, he took from the table a small silver-mounted pistol, and put the muzzle between his white teeth.

The action was unexpected, and something in the man's look made me feel that it was not a piece of bravado. Beyond a doubt, this poor prince, with his pleasure-loving, unsophisticated nature and vigorous untried affections, had got so ensnared in our great social cobweb as to have seriously meditated making away with himself. Suicide would appear to him the most obvious and easy way out of all difficulties; and I could only wonder—and be thankful—that in his solitary unhappiness he had not already made the experiment. That the thing could be considered morally reprehensible had never probably occurred to him; his philosophy of life (so far as he had ever declared any) being to the effect that everybody ought to do what seems to them good, and trust to a beneficent Providence that it would all come out right. However, as an older man than himself, and one whose contact with the realities of things had begun comparatively early, I took it upon myself to place the rights of the matter before him in as forcible a manner as I could. My arguments and earnestness produced some effect upon him, and he ultimately seemed inclined to

view his prospects in a somewhat less despondent light. I also attempted to persuade him to explain his position to Miss Moore as frankly as he had explained it to me, and trust to her good sense to accept the inevitable, and not to allow a first disappointment to mar her hopes in the future. I did not, indeed, at that time, seriously apprehend that the girl was really so ready to fling away her life as Saroni seemed to believe; but I recognised the possible consequences to a passionate girl of a sudden and irretrievable shock to her affections, and I feared that the abrupt disclosure of the fact that the man on whom she had built her hopes was actually married to another, would be more likely to impel her to some rash act than would a guarded intimation of what was in store, before it had come to pass. But on this point I could not get Saroni to see with me. So far as I could judge, his disinclination was owing rather to the reluctance (natural to a man of his character) to do anything painful so long as it could possibly be avoided, than to an incapacity to perceive that I had reason on my side. Be that as it may, I was at length obliged to leave him without having brought him to any satisfactory decision on the point in question, and not without some misgivings as to the upshot of the affair.

I called upon him several times after this, but failed to find him at home. One day, however, I met him coming out of his club in Pall Mall, and at his request accompanied him home.

On our arrival there, he threw off his hat and coat, as his custom was, and stretched himself out at full length on the hearthrug. His aspect was more dejected than ever.

'Well, what is the news since I saw you last?' I demanded in a cheerful tone.

'She knows everything now,' replied Saroni, without looking up.

'You mean Miss Moore, I suppose?'

He nodded.

'Well, you did right to tell her. How did she take it?'

'I wrote to her,' he replied; 'and this morning I got that packet.' He pointed to a small parcel on the table, done up in white paper, and addressed in a female hand. It had been opened, and then folded again.

'The things you had given her?' I said. He looked at me without speaking. 'And what word did she send?' I continued.

'That was all,' answered the poor fellow. 'There was no letter—there was nothing. If she had hated me, it could not have been otherwise.'

'If she does hate you,' said I, 'don't you see it's the best thing that could possibly happen? It's a sure sign that she will recover, and forget you before you forget her.'

'But I don't want her to hate me: I love her more than ever: and I don't want her to forget me!' declared this incorrigible young nobleman.

'In that case, I have no further sympathy

to bestow upon you,' returned I, half angry and half amused. 'It's my opinion you're not half so badly off as you pretend. You don't understand Englishwomen; they are of a different constitution from those that grow under an Italian sun. Take my word for it, you are well out of the scrape; and you and Miss Moore will both live to rear your respective families in peace and comfort.'

'You are sensible, but to be sensible is not everything,' was the prince's answer. 'I have something here'—he struck his breast—'that tells me it will not end as you think. Well, I am not good company to-day, my dear. I wished you should know the last, that is all; so now you shall leave me to be disagreeable to myself. A rivederla!'

I accepted my dismissal, expecting soon to see him again. But, as it turned out, that was not to be. We did not meet until after the ocean had been between us.

CHAPTER IV.

A FEW days previous to the date appointed for Saroni's wedding he made his appearance at a large house in South Kensington, and was immediately shown upstairs. After he had walked up and down the parlour for about five minutes, a young lady came in, let her hand rest in his for a moment, and then seated herself in

an easy-chair beside a huge delft jar full of flowers.

'You are earlier than I expected,' she said. 'You don't often come too early.'

Her face was pretty, though somewhat lacking in expression; but she had a plaintive way of drawing her eyebrows together and bringing up her lower lip, like a spoilt child. Her figure was shapely, and rather slender than plump, and she managed it with singular grace. Her dress was rich, but made with perfect art, and admirably adapted to the wearer.

'Does it please you for me to be early?' demanded Saroni, standing in front of her, with one hand resting on the jar of flowers.

'That is a strange question to ask the girl who is going to become your wife next week,' she replied, with a reproachful glance. 'I don't know what you expect me to be! I have never known any man before you, and I should like to feel at least acquainted with you before I give myself to you for ever. When I was at the convent, everybody was good to me, and did things to please me; but I don't know whether you will be good to me. I should like to be sure that you will at least try to make me happy. I have not been very happy since I left the convent. Mamma is almost like a stranger to me, and she is such an invalid she cannot amuse me, or go about with me. I have been in London six months, and I have not seen anything or met anybody except you. Sometimes I feel afraid of you.'

'I have not much that I can give, but what there is you will have,' said Saroni, pulling his beard. 'You will be a princess.'

The girl opened and shut her fan, looked up at him for a moment, and looked away. 'Yes,' she said, almost inaudibly: 'if it had not been for that . . .'

'I have something for you to hear,' said Saroni, breaking into the pause. He plucked a cluster of white geranium from its stem, and twisted it between his fingers as he went on. 'If you think it would be bad for you it is the time to tell it now. Perhaps I would not be a good husband,—how can I know it better than you? Signorina, I do not wish to do you harm. If you say now that you will be free, I will say it also. After five days it is too late. To be a princess and not yet to be happy is possible. Shall it be like that?'

The girl's face flushed, and her lip trembled. 'You want to break off our engagement,' she said, angrily. 'You have led me on all this time, only to tell me that now! It is unkind and cruel of you!' she went on, breaking into tears. 'You want to get rid of me, and you want me to bear the blame. I won't have it so! If you mean to leave me, go; but you shall never say it was I who proposed it. You think you can insult me because I have no one to defend me. I believe you love some one else, and you want to go to her. If you do, I hope she will serve you as you have served me!'

Saroni's face darkened, and he set his teeth together. But after a few moments, shrugging his shoulders with a half-smile, he tossed away the sprig of geranium, stooped forward, and lightly touched her shoulder. She drew away from his touch petulantly; her face buried in her hands. In a little while, however, she allowed herself to glance at him askance, and finally, wiping her eyes and catching her breath in little sobs, she disposed herself to listen to her future husband's apology, if it should be forthcoming.

'We will not remember all that,' was what he said; 'it is gone by.'

'If you expect me to forget such things, why do you say them?' was her rejoinder.

'One must say them, so that it may be understood and settled,' answered Saroni, in a less serious tone than he had before used. 'It is told me that I am a wild animal—that I do not know how to be as other men. But after this there shall be no other hesitations; we shall go on, and not have fears, and enjoy ourselves. You are so pretty, you can make wild animals tame. Well, now I have something to tell you besides that.'

'Is it something pleasant?' asked she, with a plaintive look.

'Oh, very pleasant! We shall be married on Thursday, but it is Saturday when the steamer goes from Liverpool; that gives a day before we have to go there. At Richmond the river is very pretty. You have not seen it?'

'No, indeed I have not,' said the girl, sitting up and beginning to look animated.

'There is a house there beside the river, and a boat,' continued Saroni, in the same light tone. 'They will be ours until the day after. In the afternoon, after you have been made a princess, we shall say good-bye to your mamma, and go down there by ourselves. We shall have our dinner there, and in the evening, when it is cool, we shall get in the boat and row along the river. Then, on Friday, it will be time to go to Liverpool, and sail to America. Will that be good for a beginning?'

'I think I shall like it very much.'

'We shall say good-bye to England there,' remarked the Italian, drawing a deep breath. 'Have you loved England, Signorina?'

'Oh, pretty well; but I have not had much time, you know.'

'It is better, I think, you should not love it very much, since we must leave it. But I have been here longer.' He paused, his black eyes resting musingly on her upturned face. 'I shall say good-bye to many things on that day,' he added, dropping his voice. 'Good-bye for the last time!'

I often used to wonder, at a subsequent period, what possessed Saroni to make this expedition to Richmond. Not that I felt any doubt that his purpose was to see Ethel Moore; that was evident at once. But why should he wish fruitlessly to torture himself and her by

such leave-taking, and why, especially, should he deliberately plan to have it take place on the first night of his marriage, and with his wife, as it were, standing by? One theory that I attempted to adopt was that he had hoped to bring the two women together and effect a sort of reconciliation between them. But the thing was too unlikely, even if the appalling sequel had not additionally discredited it. To this hour, I can do little more than conjecture what may have been in Saroni's mind when, on that Thursday evening, he got into the boat with his new-made wife and dropped leisurely down the stream. All that can be confidently asserted is that the Princess Saroni's innocent little heart was infinitely far from harbouring any suspicion of what was in the wind. Her only thought was to enjoy the sights and sounds of the twilight river, together with the pleasurable excitement of the first opening out before her of a new and untried life. There is nothing to show that she was so much as aware of the existence of Ethel Moore, much less that she meditated any injury towards her. Hers was not a profound nature, nor had the method of her bringing-up tended to enlarge her faculties; but she was at all times good-humoured and easily pleased, and was incapable of bearing serious malice towards anyone.

What actually happened, so far as was known at the time, was simple enough, and is easily told. The prince and princess dined at six o'clock, the dinner having been cooked for

them by the *chef* of a neighbouring hotel; for, as they were going to spend but one night in the villa, they had brought no servants of their own with them. At half-past seven they got into the boat, Saroni taking the oars, while his wife sat in the stern and managed the tiller. The villa is situated a little above the old stone bridge; and a good while before eight o'clock two or three persons noticed the boat drop down beneath it, pass on to the railway bridge lower down, and so go round the curve and out of sight. From this time nothing was known to have been seen of them; but it was inferred that they could not have remained away longer than three hours, because, at a quarter before eleven o'clock, a policeman testified to having seen the parlour lighted, and Princess Saroni in the act of drawing down the blind. The following morning the party were driven to the railway station, were locked into a reserved compartment by the deferential guard (who had the prince's half-crown in his pocket), and so proceeded to London. The same night they went on, in accordance with their prearranged plan, to Liverpool; and finally they embarked on Saturday on board the Cunard Company's steamship 'Russia,' which duly landed them in New York on the Tuesday week following. Such is the plain chronology of events, with only a single ghastly occurrence omitted. For on that same Thursday night of the newly-married pair's excursion down the river, a human life came

to a violent end within a few yards of a place where their boat must have passed. Whether or not the death were self-inflicted, and whether or not the Prince and Princess Saroni were aware of the tragedy at the time it happened, were questions which engaged the attention and taxed the brains of many ingenious persons for a long time afterwards.

CHAPTER V.

It was not until the Monday, if I remember right, that in looking over the morning paper I came across a paragraph announcing another 'mysterious disappearance.' A young lady, Ethel Moore by name, had left her home near Isleworth, on the Thames, somewhere between seven and nine o'clock on the evening of Thursday, September 1. Her description followed; and it was requested that any information should be sent to her father, the Rev. James Moore, at the above address.

The name, of course, struck me at once, and gave me that uncomfortable sensation which belongs to those who find themselves innocent accomplices, so to speak, in some questionable affair which has already attained publicity. It was, indeed, open to me not to reveal my knowledge of Miss Moore, and my first impulse was to adopt that course; but a little reflection convinced me that I had no

right to consult my own convenience in a case of such evident gravity. I could not help connecting her disappearance with the fact (whereof I alone was cognisant) of her relations with Saroni; nor did I entertain much doubt that this was the only clue which would be at all likely to lead to her discovery. Naturally, I was at this period far from imagining that the poor girl was not alive; in fact, if the truth must be told, I had stumbled into a wild idea that she had in some way eloped with the Italian prince. It is needless to add that this notion did not withstand the test of a few hours' consideration of the circumstances. But where, then, was she? By the time I had asked myself this question once or twice, I began to realise that the elucidation of it might conceivably be attended with a good deal of inconvenience to my eccentric friend. Whatever line of action I decided upon, therefore, could not be too carefully thought out beforehand; and after spending the rest of the day in anxious cogitation, I determined to take a night's sleep upon it, and begin my labours with the freshness of the morning.

My first step, on the Tuesday, was to betake myself to Isleworth, and have an interview with the Rev. James Moore. He turned out to be a very grim and difficult old personage; and he not only had never heard that his daughter had lately indulged in an attachment to anyone, but he utterly and abusively refused to accept my insinuations to that effect. When,

however, I had so far opened my mind to him as to shake his conviction on this point, he became equally intractable on another score; for now he declared that his daughter was a dishonoured wretch, and that he would never spend another thought or word upon her. And even after I had pointed out the utter improbability of their being together, and the possibility (which was hourly becoming more and more of a certainty to myself) that she had taken some still more desperate means of avoiding the agony of a separation, it was anything but easy to stimulate this cantankerous parent into betraying a decent degree of interest in her fate.

Unwilling to put the worst construction upon the case so long as any reasonable hope of a brighter solution remained, I began with setting the police in motion in whatever direction there was likelihood of her having taken flight. After two or three days' scouring of the country, including strict inquiry at most of the English seaports, the report was returned that no person answering to her description had been seen or heard of. Moreover, it transpired that she had taken no money with her on leaving her father's house; the only articles belonging to her that were missing being the ordinary black silk dress that she wore, and a necklace and a bracelet of chased silver which had been given to her by her deceased mother, and which she seldom was without. It was evident that she could not have travelled far on such capital as this. The area of inquiry was

narrowing day by day, until at length it centred upon the river, and remained there. It had been my unwilling premonition all along that the revelation of the mystery was to be sought in no other place than this, and the slow logic of events was proving me to have been right.

I remember being struck, more than once, with the oddity of the fact that I, of all men, should be showing myself so active in a matter in which I had no personal stake. My indolence was temperamental, and had been steadily confirmed by practice; and yet here I was getting up early and going to bed late, and working zealously all day, on behalf of a woman whom I had never seen, and whose fate, whatever it was, could have no sort of bearing upon my own. But the truth was that Saroni, not Ethel Moore, was the real stimulus to my exertions. I apprehended that the catastrophe would tend in a greater or less degree to compromise him; and, as I thoroughly believed in his actual innocence of any voluntary blame, I was persuaded that whatever contributed towards discovering the facts must in proportion become auxiliary to his vindication. I was probably as intimate a friend as Saroni had possessed in London, and in this hour of his need I found my affection for him even more cordial than I had supposed it to be.

On Monday, September 12, the revelation came. A fisherman punting along the southern bank of the Thames, opposite Kew Gardens,

hooked up the body of a woman who had evidently been in the water a good deal more than a week. Though greatly swollen and otherwise disfigured, it was still recognisable as that of a young woman with regular features and dark hair. I saw the body, as it lay awaiting the coroner's inquest that same afternoon; and on my return to town I telegraphed to Saroni, under cover to his bankers in New York, the following message: 'Ethel Moore found drowned in Thames near Richmond. Send immediately sworn statements of your whereabouts and actions on September 1, between seven and eleven p.m.' This I despatched in anticipation of the turn the inquest was certain to take. I did not, indeed, expect that Saroni's personal presence could in any event be required; but I foresaw that his authenticated testimony might be valuable as a corroboration and amplification of my own. As regarded the identification of the remains, there was—'fortunately,' as the coroner remarked—no difficulty. I was present when that ceremony took place. 'Do you recognise this body as that of anyone you know?' inquired the official of the Rev. James Moore, who stood beside the pallet, with his hat dragged down upon his wrinkled brow, and the harsh skin puckering and twitching round the corners of his eyes and mouth.

'It is the body of my daughter, Ethel Moore,' replied he, with a dogged but unready utterance. 'I recognise it by the general appearance, though grievously disfigured; by the

dress; by the initials on the handkerchief; and likewise by the necklace and bracelet of chased silver, which were given to her ten years ago by her mother, and which she habitually wore. Is that sufficient, sir?'

'Amply sufficient, Mr. Moore,' returned the official, bowing, and eyeing him curiously.

The old man turned, and made as if he would go out of the door; but I noticed that his step was uncertain, and he stretched out one arm as though to grope his way. Coming against the jamb of the doorway, he grasped it between his hands and leaned his head and shoulder against it heavily. I thought he was going to fall, and put my arm underneath his. But after a minute or two his giddiness passed off; he freed himself from my support, and once more faced the heap of mortality on the pallet.

'Listen to me, sir,' he said, in a grating whisper; 'and you'—he beckoned to the policeman—'mark my words, and forget them not. They will try to prove that this child committed suicide. I tell you it is false! She was murdered—murdered.' He lifted his long arm with its bony hand clenched, and brought it down with a heavy gesture, to emphasise the word. 'She was misled, and then murdered; I affirm it before my God! And so long as the Lord spares me life and sense, I will search to find the murderer out, and to bring him to justice. Have you heard me?'

'All right, sir,' said the policeman, respectfully, but not at all overawed; 'I will make a

note of your statement, and nobody will be 'appier to take the guilty parties into custody. when found, than I shall. Meantime I will suggest, sir, that the less you allow yourself to get excited and talking in that kind of a way, the more likely you'll be to get your 'ands on the guilty parties, if any there be. You'll be summoned on the inquest, sir, in course; I wish you good-day, sir.'

The main events of the (as it turned out to be) preliminary inquest may be briefly told. The discussion turned chiefly on the probability of suicide: for the theory of accidental death was negatived by the fact that a mass of stones, twenty or thirty pounds in weight, was found in a platted twine mailbag, attached to the girl's waist. They had held the body down, and kept it from drifting. I related my conversation with Saroni, which went to show that a motive for suicide might exist. One juryman objected that the prince might have designedly led me to suppose that Ethel Moore's attitude towards him was different from what may really have been the case; but this point was unexpectedly met by the testimony of a waterman, who stated that, some four weeks previous, he had been in the way of overhearing a conversation between Miss Moore (whom he knew by sight) and a 'furren genleman,' whom he sufficiently described; in which the lady as good as vowed she'd drown herself if the gentleman went for to keep company with any other woman besides her. In short, the preponder-

ance of evidence, as well as of rational probability, was overwhelmingly on the side of suicide; the single awkward circumstance of an opposite tendency being that Saroni should have visited Richmond, and been on the river, on the very night and at the very place in which the tragedy occurred. But although I was unable to furnish any authoritative explanation on this head, I submitted to the jury that if Saroni had meditated anything in the shape of a violent interview with Ethel Moore, he would assuredly not have taken his wife down the river with him to witness it. The coroner expressed his concurrence with this argument, but remarked that it would have been desirable to have Prince Saroni's evidence as to how he spent the evening of the 1st of September. I thereupon informed the jury that I had telegraphed to the prince in that sense three days before, and that the attested document might be expected to arrive in about a week. The coroner thanked me for my forethought, and adjourned the inquest until the desired link should be supplied.

It was in less than a week that I was startled by a sharp and imperious knock at the door; and before I could open my mouth to say 'Who's there?' the door was flung open, and in strode Saroni himself. He was gaunt, travel-stained, and hectic with excitement. I sprang to my feet, and we confronted each other for a moment without speaking.

'Is it true—this?' were his first words;

and thrusting his hand in his pocket, he pulled out the torn and crumpled telegram that he had received in New York.

'Yes,' I answered. 'I am glad you came, Saroni; it is better on all accounts. Is your wife with you?'

'My wife? No!' He looked hard at me, and added, 'She will not be wanted.'

'Certainly not. And there will be no difficulty of any kind. Of course you can give the evidence that is wanted?'

He nodded. 'I saw her on that night,' he said. 'I went there to see her.'

'You did see her? Why? How?'

'Because of this,' he replied, producing a letter from his pocket, which he handed to me. It bore the date of August 25, was written in a woman's hand, and was signed 'Ethel Moore.' It was couched in sad but gentle terms, and the burden of it was that Saroni should meet her once more before he went away. 'Do not fear that I shall trouble you,' it said; 'I only want to part from you in kindness. And bring your wife with you, that I may see her, if possible, without her seeing me. Come to the place on the river bank that you know; I shall be near there at half-past eight on Thursday.' There was very little more than this in the letter.

'It would certainly not lead one to expect anything bad,' I remarked. 'Did you answer it?'

'I let her know I would be there. Then I went to Miss Medwin, and made arrange-

ments that we should on that day come to Richmond.'

'Of course you said nothing to her of your intention in going there?' Saroni shook his head, and sank heavily into the chair which I had forgotten to offer him. I brought some wine, and he poured out and drank two or three glasses in succession. 'Did you find Miss Moore in the same mood in which her letter seems to have been written?' I went on.

'I thought it—yes. I kissed her. Diavolo! I could have gone with her anywhere—to the death! If I had known this was to come . . . Well, a woman can deceive!'

'Was there a meeting between her and your wife?'

'Bah! that would be folly. Perhaps Ethel could have seen her as we passed in the boat—I know not. I left her further along the bank, in the boat; then I came back walking. Ethel was there.' He stopped, and seemed for a while plunged in gloomy abstraction. 'Before ten minutes it was over; then I went back to the boat. She had seemed not very sad.'

'Poor girl!' I muttered. 'She must have plunged in that same night, after you had gone. Poor girl! After all, it was you who killed her, Saroni.'

'That is a lie!' cried he, leaping to his feet. At first I thought he was going to attack me. His set teeth gleamed through his black beard, and there was a glare in his eyes that was almost demoniacal. I had never

seen such an expression in his face before, and, to tell the truth, it made me feel for a moment as if there might be possibilities in Saroni which I had not reckoned with. The next moment I had called to mind the state of nervous and mental exhaustion and exasperation under which he must be labouring, and felt no wonder that he should not be master of himself. With some difficulty I quieted him sufficiently to get him to lie down on the floor (he would not go near either the bed or the sofa), where after a few minutes he fell into a heavy sleep. There was a wild, haggard sort of beauty in him as he lay there. It was evening before he awoke; and then, refusing my invitation to dine, he went away, with the understanding that we were to meet at the adjourned inquest on the morrow; and I was left alone to ponder over our strange interview.

For I must confess that it seemed to me strange, in more ways than as to its unexpectedness. Saroni had made no direct profession of grief for Ethel's terrible death: yet some such expression was to have been looked for from a man of impulses so unrestrained and primitive as his. His mood had seemed fierce, gloomy, and inward; and his burst of passion at my remark was perhaps not, after all, explicable on the theory of mere nervous irritation. Was a remorse haunting him to which he had given me no clue? I remembered his having told me of Ethel's threat to haunt him after her death, and I wondered whether some

secret self-upbraiding of the nature to which I had alluded had indeed conjured up a grisly hallucination of ghostly visitations. Had he, in the passion of their last farewell, spoken some word which had driven Ethel to desperation, and the memory of which dogged him now? I could only conjecture, and then hope that my more sombre conjectures were not true. I told myself, at last, that I did not understand Saroni; there were depths in him which I had not sounded. Meanwhile, I was glad that the outburst which I had witnessed had not taken place before the coroner's jury.

The inquest was resumed next day, with Saroni as principal witness. On this occasion he was quiet and composed, and I noticed that he had taken unusual pains with his personal appearance. The gist of his evidence was substantially as I have given it; and although it surprised the jury, they were manifestly satisfied with it: the impression produced was a good one. The only noteworthy occurrence during the proceedings was the brief cross-questioning to which Saroni was subjected at the hands of the Rev. James Moore. The grim old minister had said little or nothing at the first inquest, beyond answering the few formal questions which were addressed to him; but now he emerged from his reserve.

'Sir,' said he, standing up, rigid and angular in his rusty black garb, and fixing his dull grey eyes on the vivid, swarthy Italian—'Sir, did you love my daughter?'

'I loved her,' answered Saroni.

'Why did you keep me in ignorance of your love for her?'

'It was partly her own wish. She said you had never loved her, and she did not love you. I was not concerned to have to speak with you.'

The old man winced perceptibly at the first sentences, but he immediately commanded himself and went on.

'When you first met my daughter, were you betrothed to another lady?'

'Not at first; but in a little while after that.'

'When did you first tell my daughter of your betrothal?'

'It was between the first weeks of August.'

'How did she receive the announcement?'

'She said many things. There was pain and anger. She said she would drown herself in the river. I spoke so that she should not; but my heart was in trouble.'

'When she understood that, although you loved her, you would marry the other lady for her money, did you propose that your love should continue in dishonour?'

Saroni's face flushed, and the snake-like vein in his temple seemed to writhe. 'She would not have yielded to it,' he said, in a defiant tone. 'It is you who would do her dishonour.'

'Did she submit tamely to be thrown aside, so that you might pay your debts and live in purple and fine linen?'

'No, she did not submit,' said Saroni, after a pause.

'In what way, if any, did you attempt to pacify her?'

'I said I would not be married to the other, and I would come to her, and lose all except her, if she would have it to be so.'

'If you meant what you said, why did you not do it?'

'She would not have it so. You have read her letter, and you have said it was written in her hand.'

'She wrote the letter in order to secure the interview which, otherwise, you would have refused her. But what did she say to you, when you stood together on the river bank, just before you stuffed the handkerchief into her mouth, and strangled her with your hands, and then sank her body in the river with a bag of stones at her waist?'

In uttering these words, each one of which was charged with all the venom of bitter hatred, the bony figure of the grey-haired man seemed to grow taller, his clenched hands reached forward as if to crush his enemy, and his eyes had the dull fixed glitter of a serpent's. For an instant, it appeared to me that Saroni blenched. It may have been my fancy, however. The instant after, at all events, he had drawn himself up, and was saying with a quietness in which there was something contemptuous, 'I must request the court that it shall protect me. This man has gravely mistaken.

I have never been to his daughter anything except her lover. I should be happier to be dead myself than to have harmed her, or let her be harmed.'

The coroner cleared his throat, and administered a mild remonstrance to the Rev. Mr. Moore, to which the jury murmured their assent. His attack, though ingeniously arranged, had failed in any way to invalidate the prince's testimony. No motive had been shown sufficient for even the shadow of a justification for a charge of murder. Every allowance should of course be made for the painful and harrowing position of the reverend father of the deceased, but he must try and reconcile himself to accepting facts as they were. The coroner went on to presume that the jury would not experience any difficulty in deciding upon their verdict. Perhaps they had decided upon it already? The foreman replied that such was the case, and that their verdict was that deceased came to her death by drowning herself while temporarily in an unsound state of mind. They also desired to present their respectful condolences to deceased's father; and to thank Prince Saroni for his prompt courtesy in travelling three thousand miles for the sake of assisting them in their duties. The inquest then closed.

But as Saroni and I were leaving the house, a heavy, hasty step came after us, and the Rev. James Moore placed himself in our way.

'I wish to say a parting word to you, sir,'

he began, in his harsh monotonous tones, addressing himself to the prince, who faced him silently and contemptuously; 'we shall see each other again. I saw murder in your face to-day, and I will wring the confession of it from you yet. You have escaped for once; but you will live day and night in fear of discovery; and when you are discovered, I shall be there to see. May God treat you with no more mercy than you showed to that dead girl!'

'Sir, you make yourself in my way,' was all that Saroni condescended to reply; and, passing by him, he resumed his walk by my side, to all appearance unmoved.

CHAPTER VI.

SARONI returned to America the week following. Of course he kept in retirement during the few days that he remained in London (which there was very little difficulty in doing, since nobody was in town), and even I saw very little of him. In fact, I cannot say that I very assiduously sought his companionship. Some barrier—I could not divine what—seemed to lie between us, that had not been there before. He was not the same man that he used to be—though that was scarcely to be expected. He never wrote to me during his stay in Washington; but I used to occasionally

hear of him indirectly. So far as could be judged, he appeared to have resigned himself to his lot very philosophically. He became noted in the American capital for his entertainments; and his wife, whom her marriage would seem to have improved and developed, was spoken of as a great beauty and a most charming hostess. It was added that the two were conspicuously fond of each other—a peculiarity which, on the other side of the Atlantic, stands less in the way of a married couple's popularity than is the case in London.

In the year which ensued, the only incident worth recording as bearing upon the present history was the death of Mrs. Medwin, the Princess Saroni's mother. She was the princess's last surviving relative. Not long afterwards the rumour reached me that the Saronis were about to return to Europe. They would not, however, go to London, but would land at Havre, and proceed in the first instance to Paris.

I should have mentioned that the Rev. James Moore did not allow the acquaintance between us, begun under such sinister circumstances, to drop. Ever and anon I ran across him, or received a call from him; and always he took care to inform me of the fact that his conviction of Saroni's guilt remained unaltered; and, further, that he was employing every means to come upon the evidence confirmatory of his suspicions, with good hopes of ultimate success. It was an ugly spectacle, that of this

old man, by profession dedicated to the work of spreading Christ's gospel on earth, giving up his few remaining years of life to the prosecution of unholy and desperate revenge. But he would give ear to no representations on this score; his one thought—now practically his monomania—was to bring Saroni to the gallows. On this theme he would discourse, in his slow, acrid tones, at inexhaustible length; but without ever saying anything which might lead a sane person to suppose that his mania had anything to substantiate it.

About the time (it was in April, if I am not mistaken) that the Saronis were expected to arrive in Paris, I took a fancy to go thither myself. It was not with the special intention of seeing my old friend, though that was among my anticipations. As it happened, I encountered him on the first day after my arrival, at Munroe's banking house, and he at once invited me to visit him. He was considerably changed, both in aspect and in manner. He had grown so much stouter that, looking at his figure alone, I should never have recognised him; and his glance had lost the briskness and intensity that it used to have. His gait, too, was sluggish and dawdling; and altogether he impressed me as a man who had deteriorated. However, I promised to call on him and the princess on the first opportunity; and accordingly on the next afternoon I was ushered into her drawing-room.

She was a young and strikingly handsome

woman, though a good deal emaciated, the American air seeming to have taken from her the flesh it had bestowed on her husband. Her eyes were large and brilliant, but they had an anxious, restless look, and she had a trick of ever and anon half glancing over her shoulder, though her only interlocutor was seated in front of her. Her hands, which were very refined in form and texture, and of a pale brown hue, were never completely at rest; if they were not playing with her fan or handkerchief, or moving a book or a paper-knife on the table, they were twisting themselves together slowly and ceaselessly in her lap. Her face, though not a happy or serene one, had in it a great and yearning tenderness, and struck me as being somehow strangely pathetic.

She greeted me with cordiality; but I noticed, during the earlier part of our conversation, that she had the air of watching me with singular intentness—so much so, indeed, that on two or three occasions she replied at random to my remarks, or ignored them altogether. But after a time this watchfulness died away, and she became at length comparatively composed and unpreoccupied. The longer we talked the more her charm grew upon me; and I wondered that Saroni should ever have wished for a better wife than this. Half as good a one, I thought, would have contented me.

'How did you like America?' I inquired.

Very much; it is a fine country, and they are an easy, hospitable people. We made

many friends, whom I was sorry to leave. Perhaps we shall go back some day—soon.'

'But we shall surely see you in London before you return?'

'No,' replied the princess, fixing her eyes upon me intently, and pressing her hands together. 'No; we shall not go to London.'

'Well, it is not a very cheerful place, certainly,' said I, feeling that perhaps I had better not have introduced the subject. 'It is neither picturesque nor salubrious. Paris and Washington are both much prettier places, and much better off for climate.'

This set us off talking about the comparative architectural merits of various cities, and the princess observed that she had some very beautiful photographs of the street in which they had lived while in Washington. 'I must show it you,' she added; 'I think it is in this portfolio.'

The portfolio was in the window at the farther end of the room, a ponderous affair arranged on a mahogany stand. We walked over to it, and the princess began ransacking its contents in search of the photograph. While doing this she faced the window and had her back to the door, while I stood sideways in respect of the room, thus commanding its length. Just then the servant entered, ushering in someone; the noise from the street through the open window prevented her from hearing the announcement, and she did not turn round. But I saw a tall stiff figure, dressed in a long

black coat, enter through the door, and, after looking in our direction, pause. I did not recognise the figure in the slight glance I gave it.

'I think this must be it—yes, it is!' said the princess, drawing out one of the photographs from the portfolio. She had a full, agreeable voice, but with a sad chord occasionally vibrating through it, corresponding with the pathos in her face.

'See, this was our house,' she continued, pointing it out to me with her finger; 'this with the high steps and the portico. I loved that portico especially, because it reminded me a little of a house I lived in—or knew, at least, in England. This was the window of my boudoir.'

She broke off abruptly, and gave that odd half-glance over her shoulder to which I have already alluded. This time my glance followed hers. I had forgotten the presence of the gentleman who had lately been shown in, but he was there, still standing erect where he had first taken up his position. The Princess Saroni turned herself slowly toward him; one of her hands still grasping the bar of the portfolio stand. At the distance we were from him, it was impossible clearly to distinguish the features of the stranger. By this time, however, I had recognised him; it was the Rev. James Moore. How he had found his way hither I could not imagine; I suppose he saw Saroni's arrival mentioned in the papers. At all events, I felt

the desirability of getting him out of the house as speedily and quietly as possible, before Saroni himself should come in.

'I know this gentleman,' I muttered in an undertone to the princess. 'He is a little deranged in the upper story. If you will allow me, I will conduct him down stairs.'

She paid no attention to me. 'Do you wish to speak to me, sir?' she said to Mr. Moore. 'Will you come this way?'

'Thank you, ma'am,' replied he, moving a few steps nearer; 'it was your husband I wanted to see; but there seemed to be something familiar in your voice, so I . . . .'

A curious change came over the Rev. James Moore. His eyebrows and eyelids quivered, and then were lifted upwards, uncovering the white of the eyeball, as is said to be the case with those who behold a spectre. His hands wavered about aimlessly, and an exaggerated trembling shook his whole body. I thought he was seized with a fit, and moved hastily towards him. But he, too, was now quite unconscious of me.

'God have mercy on me!' I heard him murmur, in a thin, pithless voice. 'I'm going mad. That's my murdered girl. . . . Ethel!'

I looked at the Princess Saroni. She had raised her hands to her head, and was pressing them against her temples. As she let them fall again, she sighed—a long, lingering sigh, like the giving up of a weary and passion-strained

life. Her lips murmured something, but not audibly.

'My murdered Ethel!' quavered the old man again.

'Not murdered, father; but the murderess,' said the princess, in a dry, quiet tone. 'You have hunted me down. I am not so sorry. The thought that it was to come is gone for ever. But it was I who did it, remember!' she continued quickly; 'not the prince!'

The old man clasped his shaking hands together, and broke out in a hurried, crowing laugh. 'Alive, my girl! alive and sound and well, Ethel! The Lord be thanked—the Lord be praised! Never mind if you killed her—it served her right for ousting you from your rights! Ho, ho, ho, ho! And now you'll come back and live with me, Ethel, my girl. And never think I didn't love you, child! I did, I did! and you shall never hear a hard or loveless word from me again. Come, girl—come at once!'

He tried to take her hand and draw her away. But she avoided him quietly. 'It is too late, father,' she said. 'The truth is known now, and can never again be hidden. We cannot begin to be father and daughter now. I have had my way, and my love, for a year; and that is enough: and I was loved, too; but it was time even that should end. Even love cannot make sin good—we have had time to find that out already.'

. . . . . .

I do not find myself disposed to dwell upon

the conclusion of this affair. But a few words of explanation may be required. Although the princess—as she still deserved to be called—took upon herself the whole responsibility of the murder, it was sufficiently established on the trial that Saroni was the really guilty one. He must have meditated it for at least two weeks. At first he had planned to elope with Ethel, and as much of the property as he could manage to get into his power; and this was probably his first proposal to her; but she rejected it indignantly. He then resolved upon murder, but without making Ethel privy to his scheme. On the contrary, he made her believe that he was going to break off his engagement with Miss Medwin; and he actually kept her in this belief up to the time when he met her on the evening of September 1 on the river brink: for the letter from Ethel which he showed me on his return from America was indeed written by her, but not until after the murder had been accomplished.

What happened on that evening will never be certainly known. It was probably somewhat as follows. Saroni left his wife in the boat, and he and Ethel met at a little distance. He then told her openly that he was married, and that his wife was there. As he had calculated, Ethel's rage and jealousy drove her, for a time, out of her right senses. Then it was that he must have suggested the crime—doubtless as if on the impulse of the moment; whether Ethel accepted the suggestion eagerly

or reluctantly, Heaven only knows; as regards the way it was done, there is reason to believe that a handkerchief saturated with chloroform was one of the instruments employed. The two women had been dressed nearly alike; and the murdered girl had on Ethel's ornaments, which Saroni had once borrowed on the pretext of having them reset differently, and had then presented to his doomed wife as a wedding-gift. Everything was therefore arranged so as to favour the supposition of suicide, which had from the first formed the mainstay of Saroni's plan. In fact, I am inclined to think that his conversations with me, as recorded in the third chapter of this story, were deliberately intended by him to mislead me on that essential point.

What remains that may have seemed ambiguous may safely be left to the reader's intelligence; who will also come to his own conclusions as to Saroni's real character, and the degree of Ethel's participation in his crime. For my own part, I think he was very much as he has been here represented—genial and simple in some ways, and diabolically subtle in others; and acute enough to use his simplicity to further his diabolism. Ethel I will not presume to judge. Her former life had been repressed and barren; her love was like the sudden flowering out of some sweet but poisonous plant; her passions, good and bad, were of exceptional intensity. What she did, she did; and no doubt she suffered, even before the end.

I do not think she found in Saroni quite all that she had expected.

Saroni was, by the influence of relatives in high places, provided with the means of putting an end to his own existence in his prison cell; and he employed it. His wife was sentenced to confinement for twenty years.

CONSTANCE.

CHAPTER I.

Last summer my affairs—by which I mean a judicious mixture of duty and inclination—made it desirable that I should take a trip from a certain seaport town in Cumberland, where I then was, to the free city of Hamburg on the Baltic. I first went to Liverpool, which I had not visited since my childhood. I had no particular business there, but then I was not in a hurry, and I wished to see whether the old place had changed much since my time. I rambled over the docks; I strolled up Duke Street, but had not the resolution to knock at the old green door of the house I used to live in then—when I was ten years old. It was green still. I could have sworn to that knocker amongst a thousand; on the opposite side of the street was the great lumber yard, with the zinc-roofed building on one side of it—that wonderful arched zinc roof, which had been the object of so many childish speculations of mine, as I stared out at it, year after year, from my little bedroom window on the third storey.

But I recollected that, in those days, an old

orange woman had kept her stall on the corner of that building; and she was no longer there. Poor old soul! how she used to boil her oranges! and where is she now? This reflection decided me afresh not to lift the knocker of the old green door. The door might be opened —I might be welcomed in comfortably enough; but where was kind old Miss Blodgett, and where was good old Mrs. Williams, and where was Miss Maria? whom I will not call old, because I had a sentimental tenderness for her thirty years ago. They have vanished, like the old orange woman.

'No, no,' I said to myself, 'I will not go in. And yet how I should like to see that little square room, across the hall from the kitchen, where the Yankee sea-captains used to smoke in the evenings, and play euchre, and spin yarns, while I stood at their knees and believed all they told me. But no, I won't go in!'

So I turned away, and went next to the Cornwallis Baths, and after that to Huguenin's Gymnasium (his son keeps the place now, but he is not my Huguenin!), and then I traversed Lord Street and Bold Street, where the shopping used to be done; and I passed St. George's Hall, which is really a fine building, even after Italy and other places; and the first thing I knew I was in Duke Street once more, and standing in front of the old green door.

I ran up the steps and knocked.

My knock was impulsive and unpremeditated, and I did not notice, at the time, what

sort of a tattoo I played upon that old green door. The civilised English caller's knock sounds rather like a hurried and stuttering apology than like a demand for admittance. I was not sufficiently composed, just then, to bear this in mind. Nor was I allowed an opportunity to reflect upon it afterwards; for a moment had scarcely elapsed before the door was opened; and the person who opened it was not the servant, but a gentleman whom I fancied at first I did not know, but whom I almost immediately recognised as a friend and fellow-countryman of mine—Henry Blount.

He looked much older than when I had last seen him, eight years before; he had grown a beard, there were some heavy lines about the corners of his eyes, and the hair seemed to have thinned away a little on the top of his head. His face, too, impressed me as being singularly pale, and there was a peculiar expression in his gaze—it was intent and yet startled. But this soon passed away, and did not return; and when I spoke his name he broke into a smile, which banished much of the prematurely aged appearance that I had noticed. He grasped my hand, and drew me into the house, asking me when I came and how I knew that he was there. 'For I only arrived yesterday,' he added.

'I knew nothing about it,' I said. 'I came here simply for sentiment's sake. I didn't even know whether the place was a boarding-house still.' Then I told him about my musings, my hesitations, and my rashness.

'Yes,' he said, 'the good old ladies are gone; but the house is about the same. Here is the smoking-room, you see. Sit down, and we'll have a pipe.'

'Are you to stay here long?' I asked him.

'I leave to-morrow for London, and beyond. I arrived only yesterday by the "Baltic," as I told you. I have knocked about a good deal since we were together in the Dock Department in New York. I don't know whether you're aware that I served the Republic for a year in the capacity of Consul?'

'Did you? Where was that?'

'Hamburg; and I'm on my way there now—on a sentimental pilgrimage, as you would say.'

'Really! Why, I'm going there, too.'

'Then, if you like, we'll go together. You had better have your things brought over here from your hotel. I want to hear what you have been doing with yourself these last years—whether you're married, for instance.'

'No. Are you?'

'Oh, as to that, it's rather a long story,' said Blount, with a short laugh. 'Perhaps it may leak out on our way to Hamburg. By the way, do you always knock that way?'

'What do you mean?'

'The way you did just now on the street door. Three heavy blows, then a pause, then three sharp and quick. It gave me a turn, I can tell you!'

'I hadn't the least idea how I was knocking.

It wasn't orthodox, I daresay; but I was not aware,' I said, laughingly, 'that you were so dreadfully particular about these things. Have you been that way long?'

'It's about three years now,' replied Blount, gravely. 'However, no matter about that. You are not married, I think you said? Well, then since we're to be together the next few days, I'll ask you to excuse me for an hour while I go and do up some odds and ends of business in the city. Dinner at six-thirty, you know.'

'I'll use my time to get my things down from the hotel.'

'All right. I'm glad to have met you.' We shook hands again. 'Don't forget to come back; and, by-the-by, there's a bell to the door, you perceive; it's generally used in preference to the knocker, I imagine.'

During the hour or two that elapsed before I saw my friend again, my thoughts dwelt upon him a good deal. It was not a boyish friendship; we had become acquainted somewhat later in life than that. I did not know much about his earlier years. I had found him agreeable in temper and manner, of a cultivated though eccentric mind, and highly imaginative and impressible. I believe he had written some poetry, which some people called insanely erotic, and others profoundly mystical. He was by birth a Virginian, and always seemed to have money enough. His disposition, I gathered, had been restless and roving; he had

travelled over the West, and had known and enjoyed the wild life there. Probably there were secrets in his life which he would never tell to any one. In person he was tall, slender, and well-proportioned, with light curling hair and beard, a high narrow forehead, and deep-set blue eyes. His customary air was grave and introspective, but his smile was very winning. His speech was delivered slowly and in a low, undulating voice; though he could use a tone like a trumpet upon occasion. Altogether I looked upon him as being a man of genius, with a strong, active and practical vein running through him; a man whom it was easier to love than to know; a man who would be implacable against a false friend, and forgiving to a generous enemy.

CHAPTER II.

BLOUNT and I had a long talk together that evening; the next day we journeyed to London, and thence we proceeded in a leisurely manner to Hamburg. As we travelled along, he instructed me from time to time in some particulars of his history since our last knowledge of each other. It was a strange story; I cannot determine how much of it may have been literal fact, and how much may have been coloured by the narrator's own feelings or mental bias or philosophy of life. Such as it

was, it was a *pièce de resistance* for me during the three or four days that we remained together. I afterwards put it together in a connected form, and here it is. Blount is the speaker.

'You recollect that just before I said good-bye to you on your departure from that little New England village of Northmere, I bought the farm and house which I had rented the year before. I made up my mind to spend my life there—of course an absurd resolution for a fellow of my age, who had knocked about the world so much, to make. Still, I thought I was settled, this time; and the principal reason why I thought so was—Constance!

'Maybe you have forgotten that girl—Constance Cambryn? unless you remembered her by her odd name. It certainly was an odd name; I have never met with it before or since. Old English, or Welsh, of course; in fact, that was an important feature about it, as you will see directly. Well, name or no name, from the time I first set eyes on her I thought I never should forget her, either in this world or the next. I daresay you might imagine, from my rhymed stuff, or from my way of talking sometimes, or what not, that I have had a good deal to do with women in my time. But it isn't the truth. No, I fought shy of them. I was confoundedly bashful, by constitution, to begin with: that is to say, I had such a big idea of what a fellow that girls like ought to be, that I was sure I never could come up

to the standard; and was always fancying that they saw my deficiencies.

'In the second place (or perhaps it was only another phase of the same thing) I had a tremendous reverence and love for anything in the shape of a woman; my mother was such a noble creature, you know, and my little sister was such a darling girl; of course, I couldn't help reverencing all other women for their sakes. Upon the whole, the consequence was I never could pluck up the courage to inflict myself upon good women; and because of their goodness, I never would have anything to do with women of the other sort—poor things! I took it out, to some extent, in writing, as you may have heard.' [I had never read any of Blount's poetry; but I did not like to tell him so. I had seen reviews of it.] 'But it was a poor sort of compensation.

'When I met Constance I said to myself, "This is the reason of it; this is what I have been waiting for!" I thought she was more nearly a perfect woman than any I had seen, and yet my dumb devil never seized me when I was with her. I felt more myself than when I was alone. Well, you are a married man; I suppose you know the sort of feeling. All I can say is, I felt it very strongly. I was in a state either of fear or of delight all the time: delight while I was with her, and, when I was away from her, fear lest she might not love me. Why should she love me? I could think of no reasonable answer to that question, and yet,

when she spoke to me or looked at me, I couldn't help believing that she did—or at least that she would, some time. Was it possible that she ever had spoken to other men with the same tone and glance that she did to me? It seemed not; still I was afraid.

'You will say I might easily have ended my suspense by saying seven words to her. Well, for a long time I never even thought of that. It didn't occur to me that any such matter-of-fact, commonplace thing as popping the question ought to take place between her and me. If we loved each other, it was too deep and sacred a matter to talk about; we would know it intuitively, and thank God for it in our prayers. Meanwhile, I was thankful enough for what I had. I was as happy as I thought was good for me, and I was rather glad than otherwise of that fear; it kept me from being foolish. It was not a serious fear, you understand; it was only something I played with. Constance was so young and so frank that I was certain there was nothing hidden in her heart; and I was sure, too, that I loved her. That being the case, I argued, all would turn out well in the end; for Constance would not let me go on loving her if she never meant to return it. Oh, I dare say I was as great an idiot, in every respect, as a first love ever made out of a sensible man.

'If you had asked me to describe her, at any time, I don't believe I could have done it. She was too near me; I was conscious of her,

inwardly, and of nothing but her, but I could no more detach her from my thought enough to tell how she looked, than I could see my own face. However, it is different now; time and other things have enabled me to picture her distinctly enough. I can see her, as she used to be then, at this moment, or at any moment. She was rather a tall girl, as you may remember, and neither slender nor the contrary. Her hands and eyes always moved together; there was a sort of sympathy between them. In fact, she was ruled altogether by her eyes; whatever they expressed, that expression was carried out by everything about her—voice, motion, attitude. Ah, my dear fellow, you never saw those eyes as I saw them. There were depths in them, but no beginning of the depths—no surface. I can't tell to this day what their colour was; their colour depended upon the mood she was in, but if I had been a painter I suppose I should have tried to solve the problem by a compromise between blue and hazel—the colour of distant woodlands after the leaves have fallen. They weren't saucer eyes, either—nothing takes away from the expression of an eye like being too big. They were of just the most effective size and shape. When they looked at me for longer than a breath or two at a time—and they did, often!—I used to be visited with a luxurious, breathless sensation; they drew me the way I most wished to go. And yet I have thought that her eyes might have been resisted

if it hadn't been for her mouth. The lips were pale red, and rather broad; they met together in a line that I can liken only to the soft warble of a bird to its mate; there was the same curving sweetness. Those lips were never still. I don't mean that she talked much; but they gave out meanings when her voice was silent—eloquent, tender meanings. When she smiled, the upper lip, which was very short, drew down the tip of her straight little nose in the most bewitching, humorous way you can imagine. But what is the use of my talking? Will all the words in the world portray the fragrant charm of a lovely girl?

'From a worldly point of view there were no objections to our being married. I was well enough off as regards money and that sort of thing; not a Crœsus, but quite solvent. Her mother (her father, you know, was dead) seemed to like me very well, and "oft invited me" to stay to tea and spend the evening, and tell them my stories; and I read them some of my poems, too. All the best ones appeared to me to have been written prophetically about Constance; but I never wrote anything about her since I made her acquaintance. Constance never criticised them, either favourably or the reverse, but she would listen to them in a way which somehow flattered me more than any eulogy. Occasionally I would have her mother and her over to my place, and we would discuss alterations and improvements, and I would show them over the grounds. Mrs. Cambryn

was a practical, matter-of-fact sort of woman, and liked to be consulted and appealed to. Then, in the evening, we would walk home together, I giving an arm to both of them. But what a difference between those two arms of mine; one was in heaven; the other, very much in the world.

'I was surprised to discover, one day, that Mrs. Cambryn, for all her common sense, was a spiritualist. To my thinking, spiritualism is not a humbug, but a profanation. It is wicked and perilous; it seeks to grasp at knowledge which mankind has no right to attain, and it ends in insanity. Mrs. Cambryn talked about a new revelation; in my opinion it was an infernal revelation as well; but at first I forbore to tell her so, because she was Constance's mother. At last she invited me to a *séance*, and then I refused point-blank, and gave her a piece of my mind; and finished by asking her how she could reconcile it with her conscience to let Constance be privy to such doings? To my sorrow, she retorted that Constance was at the root of the whole matter—that she was the "medium." That had never occurred to me. I instantly made up my mind that, medium or not, it was impossible that Constance could approve of the business; she was persuaded by her mother to lend herself to it, and that was all. But the idea shocked me inexpressibly, and brought me to a determination that otherwise I might have procrastinated over; to ask her to be my wife, and so remove her for ever

from all danger. And I acted upon that determination without loss of time.

'Constance and I were sitting, the day after that *séance* which I did not attend, in the summer-house in my garden; and Mrs. Cambryn was reading the *North American Review* on the balcony of the house, two hundred yards away. What we had been talking about I don't remember; I broke out suddenly with—

'"What did your spirits tell you last night?"

'"Don't let us talk about it," said Constance.

'"Why not?"

'"Because your tone was so cross when you asked the question."

'"If I am cross it is with the spirits—not with you."

'"Nor with Mamma?"

'"Your Mamma wouldn't care if I were. But what did they say?"

'I made my voice ludicrously complaisant, so that she laughed.

'"They told us something rather interesting," she said.

'"Was it anything you did not know before?"

'"Well, we had suspected it; but there were some strange details; and it was really quite interesting and—important!"

'"What was it about? I'm interested, too, you see."

'"You should have been there last night, then."

'"Did you wish me to be there?"

'"Yes," she said, after a pause; and she leaned a little nearer to me, and her hands moved in her lap. I put out my hand and took hers in it—a thing I had never done before. She looked at me in a startled way, but she did not resist. I wonder if her heart was beating as mine was! But I showed no sign as yet.

'"Why?" I asked her, continuing the conversation.

'"Because I sometimes feel afraid," she said, in a low tone.

'"Afraid? and revolted, too, I should think?"

'"I don't know—perhaps—Mamma likes it."

'"Your mother may tamper with her own soul if she pleases, but she has no right to interfere with yours. She ought to get some other medium."

'"I am willing to do anything for Mamma. Besides, a strange medium would not do. We could not let strangers know what was said."

'"Strangers? What are these spirits? They are strange enough, I should think! Do they pretend to be the souls of people you once knew?"

'"They are friends—more than friends; and they know things ——"

'"Things that they have seen in your minds, perhaps: nothing else!"

'"More than that. The spirit that came last night was one of our own family—at least, an ancestor of ours. He lived forty years ago, in England."

'"Who was he?"

'"A cousin of my grandfather; his name was Edward Cambryn; he was very rich. He owned great estates in Lancashire."

'"How did a cousin of your grandfather happen to be in England?"

'"He went back to England to study the history of the family; he was a great genealogist. The branch of our family living there adopted him; and at last he inherited all the estates. He died mysteriously, no one knows how or where."

'"Did the spirit tell you all this?"

'"We knew as much as that before."

'"Then he told you where and how he died, I suppose!"

'"He told us where we might go, in England, to find out about it. And then —but why should I tell you? You won't believe it. I think Mamma wants me."

'"Never mind your mother. As to my believing, I believe that the spirit told you something, though whether what he told were true or not is another question. What was it? Can't you trust me?"

'"Oh, I can trust you! Well, then, he told us that he had left papers entitling us to the estate; and he said he could not be happy

until we had found them, and been put in possession of our own."

'"Humph! Had you ever heard anything about these papers before?"

'"There had been some rumours, I believe; but we knew nothing; we only thought it might be so."

'"Do you believe this yourself, Constance?" I asked, after a pause.

'"I think I ought to believe it."

'"You ought to?"

'"Mamma believes it. It seems probable. Why should it not be true? Besides Mamma would like to go to England, and she says we are very poor."

'"Does she care so much to be rich?—I say 'So much' because, even supposing the story is all true, and that the papers were in your hands, it might take you the rest of your life to establish your claim in an English court of law. People in possession in England are not easily ousted, I can assure you. You would spend a fortune in lawyers' fees before you touched a square foot of your estates. By the way, do you know what is the value of the property?"

'"Oh, a very great deal—hundreds of thousands of pounds. I believe it includes a part of a city—a part of Liverpool. We should be rich for ever!"

'"You, or your great grandchildren. Do you wish to be rich, too, Constance?"

'"I don't know. I never tried it."

'"Constance," I said, "I haven't got hundreds of thousands of pounds, and I don't own Liverpool; but I love you, and I'll give you all I've got, if you'll let me."

'"Oh, Mr. Blount, I can't—I ought not to——"

'"Not unless you love me; but if you do love me then you ought to." I spoke quietly and resolutely; in fact, I was amazed at my own boldness.

'"I do love you," was what she said next, looking up at me with the simplicity of a child. "I do love you."

'"Enough to marry me?"

'"Yes—if it depended on me," she answered, blushing.

'"Then we are as good as married now! Oh, Constance!"

'"No—no!" she murmured, shrinking away from me.

'"What do you mean by No? Who says No?"

'"Mamma would say No. Oh, don't look so angry!"

'"Good heavens, Constance, are you your mother's slave? What does she want to do with you? She can't prevent your marrying whom you choose. Has she told you that you must not marry me?"

'"No—no. But you don't understand. She likes you very much—you must have seen that; but she thinks there will be something

else—someone else; she has been told that I should marry him."

'"The spirits have told her that?"

'"Yes."

'"Can she be so insane as to believe such nonsense? Constance, can you lend yourself to it? It is giving yourself up to the very spirit of evil! God knows, I don't speak for my own sake, but I can't bear to see this going on. What these spirits want is to ruin you, body and soul; and with their infernal cunning they have first got your mother on their side. If she will go as far as this to-day, to-morrow she might be told that she must bury you alive, or —— and if you yielded she would do it. You must not yield! You would not be guiltless if you do. You would ——"

'"Hush!" said Constance, suddenly. "Mamma is here."

'In fact, there stood Mrs. Cambryn, with the *North American Review* in her hand. She had come from the house while we were absorbed in our talk. There was a peculiar expression in her face of mingled obstinacy and sharpness, and over all a half-embarrassed, half-defiant smile. It gave me a new impression of her character.

'"I was thinking it was time we bid Mr. Blount good-bye," she said, addressing herself to her daughter.

'But I was now thoroughly aroused—in a mood in which I would have faced the devil himself.

'"It is my duty to tell you, Mrs. Cambryn, that your daughter and I love each other—the words have been spoken between us."

'"I am so sorry! I almost feared as much," she returned, drily.

'"There is nothing to fear. I have money enough to support her well. If you want references of any kind I can give them to you."

'"Indeed, Mr. Blount, I want nothing of the kind. Why should I?"

'"I merely mentioned it because I believe such things are customary when a man asks a woman in marriage. But I thank you for your confidence, Mrs. Cambryn. I need not say that, when Constance is my wife, your home will be with us."

'"This is very kind of you, I'm sure, but I cannot think that Constance will ever be your wife."

'"Do you forbid her?"

'"I don't forbid her; she is of age, or nearly so, and could disobey me if she chose. But I cannot think she would marry you, Mr. Blount, though I'm sure she must feel highly complimented by your offer; and so do I. But Constance is aware that—that her destiny would not admit of her accepting it."

'"Spirit-rapping and table-turning are not destiny. Constance has told me that she loves me, and that confession has destined her to be my wife."

'"Connie, dear, is Mr. Blount right in

thinking all this?" the mother asked, turning to her daughter. The latter, during our dialogue, had been sitting with her hands folded on her knees, and her eyes downcast. She now said, without altering her position—

"'It is true that I love him."

"'I can well understand that," rejoined Mrs. Cambryn, composedly; "Mr. Blount is, I feel sure, a gentleman whom any girl might find lovable. But we do not live in an age when love can be put before everything. We have duties to perform to society and to ourselves; to neglect them for the sake of love would be selfishness. It is no slight to you, Mr. Blount, if I say that Constance is destined for a higher sphere than to live here as your wife. It is no slight to you, and neither is it any credit to her. She is a good girl, but there are many as good as she in the world, and one of them, I have no doubt, may be so fortunate as to make you happy some day." (At this Constance made an involuntary movement, and glanced up at me with a piteous appealing look; but when her mother continued to speak, she dropped her eyes again.) "Some women are born to be queens and empresses; through no merit of their own, but because it is their fortune. Many of them, I daresay, would have been glad to pass a quiet life of domestic happiness and contentment, but destiny called them elsewhere, and they were bound to obey. It is the same with Constance. She is not to be either a queen or an empress, but she is to

inherit a great estate in England, and marry a great man there—a great nobleman. I cannot provide her such happiness as she might have had with you; but that is neither here nor there. And if you love her unselfishly, Mr. Blount—which I don't at all question—you will not at all add to her unhappiness by trying to turn her from her duty. She sees it as clearly as I do, and I am sure she will fulfil it."

'All this bewildered me. The style and tone of Mrs. Cambryn's harangue was quite in keeping with the idea I had previously had of her; but at the same time the opinions and the application of them were so unexpected and astounding, that I could scarcely believe she was indeed that mother of Constance whom I had fancied I knew so well—whose measure I thought I had taken so completely. Such a grotesque mingling of a common-sensible method and manner of expression with ideas so hopelessly perverted, and credulity so abject, I had never conceived of till now.

'"Are you in sober earnest?" I involuntarily asked her.

'"Ask Constance if I am not," returned she, with one of her peculiar dry smiles.

'"I shall demand no confirmation of your ideas from Constance; these infernal conjurations of yours may have given you some unlawful dominion over the girl, for aught I know. But I wish you to tell me whether you honestly believe, on the authority of what you

call spiritual communications, that Constance is to become the wife of an English nobleman, and inherit an estate?"

'"I don't say that the testimony of the spirits would not be enough, even if it were not supported by collateral evidence; but as it happens to be so, and as I infer such evidence would have more weight with you, I have no objection to letting you know what it is. Constance has already told you, I believe, that this estate is known to exist, and to have been formerly in possession of our family."

'"That is no proof that it will ever come into your possession again."

'"Certainly not, when taken by itself. But that is not all. The cousin of Constance's grandfather ——"

'"I know about that, too. It is a mere rumour, and can never be substantiated. And even if it were, as I said to Constance just now, it does not follow that you could do anything. You would need a fortune nearly as big as that you expect to get in order to bring your claims before the courts."

'"I think you exaggerate a little; I know there are plenty of lawyers who would be glad to undertake the case on speculation—for a share in the profits when they were realised. Still, I will admit that I should not care to risk everything even on so good grounds if there were nothing else to encourage me. I am a person not without judgment and discretion, Mr. Blount, as I should have thought you might

have known before now. Nay, I will be quite frank with you—though I am not quite sure that you deserve it—and say that until very lately—until this morning, in fact—I should have been disposed to listen to your suit for Constance's hand."

'"It was only this morning, then, that you lost your senses," I retorted, angrily.

'"I am sorry to find that you can be rude as well as incredulous," replied she, with a sarcastic inflection. She opened the *North American Review*, and took from between its leaves an envelope, bearing an English stamp and postmark.

'"I received this by the early post to-day," she said. "It is an answer to an advertisement which I have had inserted for several months past in the principal English newspapers. If you look through it you will see that I have not been so much the victim of a delusion as you suppose."

'She handed it to me as she spoke. I opened it and read it. It was dated Liverpool, and was written in a small handwriting. It stated, in effect, that the writer was a relation of the English branch of the Cambryn family; that he was well acquainted with the facts in relation to the Cambryn estates; that these were at present held by parties in accordance with a conditional provision of adverse possession in the absence of any discovered will of the late owner, Edward Cambryn, Esq.; but that in case such will should be found, and be

still operative, the estates would revert to the heirs of the late Philip Cambryn, Edward's cousin. The writer added that the place and manner of death of Edward Cambryn were not at present known, but that he had a clue, by following out which he confidently expected to clear up this obscurity, and at the same time bring to light the missing documents. He further said that he had received a legal education, which would qualify him to take charge of the case; and that he intended, as soon as possible after the despatch of this letter, to follow it to America, and do himself the honour to call upon Mrs. and Miss Cambryn, and receive their instructions; to carry out which to the best of his ability would be to him a labour of love. The letter was signed "Arthur Cambryn Fellowes."

'"A very clever composition," said I, returning it to Mrs. Cambryn. "Of course you believe everything Mr. Fellowes says?"

'"In the absence of any reason for disbelieving him—yes. Moreover, we were warned last night that such a letter as this might be expected, and that the writer of it would afford us the greatest assistance in prosecuting our claim."

'In point of fact, I was more taken aback by this new turn of events than I was willing to confess. The scheme had a certain plausibility in its present aspect, and I could well understand with what force it must recommend itself to Mrs. Cambryn, not only as chiming in

with her previous hopes and convictions, but as confirmed by her spiritual prognostications. Under such circumstances it was plain that arguments of mine would be of no avail; Mrs. Cambryn would have an answer ready for my every objection. My sole dependence must be not on logic, but feeling; and on the feeling not of the mother but of the daughter. But here I was again in doubt; for though I knew that Constance loved me, and that her heart was therefore legitimately mine, I could neither estimate nor comprehend the strength and nature of the hold her mother had upon her. The fact that Constance was a "medium" made it probable that she might be liable to have her will influenced or moulded by that of a person more resolute than herself; and there was unfortunately every reason to suppose that Mrs. Cambryn was such a person. While therefore her natural desires and instincts would lead her to me, it might be possible for her mother to compel her, by a mere act of volition, to act and speak in contradiction to those impulses. Thus the situation presented itself to me as a direct conflict of evil against good; and the arena of that conflict must be Constance's heart.

'"Am I to understand that you have any definite intentions as to the disposal of your daughter's hand?" I said to Mrs. Cambryn.

'"Perhaps you are scarcely entitled to ask the question," she answered. "Still, I see no objection to telling you that I have. The

present owner of the estates is a man of forty, and a bachelor. You may have heard his name—Lord Roscoe. It is my intention, as soon as our title to the property has been made clear, to propose an alliance to him, in virtue of which right would be done on both sides; we should come into our legal possessions, and he would not suffer for what is not, after all, his deliberate fault. By becoming the husband of Constance, and in no other way, will he be able to do us justice and to escape from impoverishing himself."

'"Will you marry Lord Roscoe, Constance—if he will have you?" I asked, turning to her.

'"It is not for me to say," was the reply. But her tone was reluctant and scarcely audible; and I noticed that while she spoke, her mother kept her eyes steadfastly fixed upon her, as if to control her very thoughts.

'"Mrs. Cambryn," said I, "I have a proposal to make which, as it may recommend itself to you from a business point of view, it is possible you will accept. There is no reason that I know of why you should be tender of Lord Roscoe; you may depend upon it that he will not be tender to you. English lords are not in the habit of marrying American girls, so far as I am aware, even when the American girls have ousted them from their estates; so that scheme may fall through in any case. But if you consent to let Constance be my wife, I will devote my whole fortune to endeavouring

to restore to you what you consider your rights. I am free to tell you that it is only the depth of my love for her that induces me to promise this; I do it to save her from the unworthy and degrading fate which she seems to lack strength to struggle against on her own account; not because I believe the attempt will succeed, or because I should expect any real good or happiness to come of its success. Still, I will do the utmost that can be done, if you will let her be my wife."

"'This is very kind of you," said Mrs. Cambryn, after a slight pause. She restored the letter to its place between the leaves of the *Review* with a meditative air, and there was a further silence. She was evidently turning the matter over in her mind. She was not yet so far gone in her infatuation as not to perceive that I was offering her a bird in the hand, and that it possessed at least the proverbial degree of value compared with those in the bush. As I watched her, and felt how much hung upon her decision, it angered me to think that so cold-hearted and worldly-minded a woman as I now know her to be should hold such power for good and evil in her hands. And Constance was watching her too; though she sat ostensibly as quiet as ever, a slight but perceptible tremor pervaded her body and quivered about her lips. Poor girl! I would have given the best years of my life to see her spring to her feet, and break asunder the invisible chains that her mother's ambitious cupidity had laid upon her, and come

to my arms and confess herself mine! But that was not to be.

'"I am afraid I must decline," said Mrs. Cambryn, looking at me with that odd expression of cunning obstinacy in her face. "I must decline, for Connie's sake."

'I made no reply; but I thought it would be a good deed if I killed the woman where she stood.

'"Besides," she went on, "it would not be right to ask you to make such a sacrifice; it would not be right, and it is not necessary. You confess that your conscience is opposed to helping us in this way, and it is never well to act against one's conscience. And then, valuable though your help would be, things have so arranged themselves that we can do without it; this Mr. Cambryn Fellowes will act in our interest, and he does not share your misgivings. And there is another consideration which will, I fear, have no weight with you, but which I could never bring myself to disregard; and that is, the declared will and revealed prophecy of the spirits. They have told us that Constance is to be the wife of a peer of England; and it would not be right, even if it were possible, to act in opposition to their decrees. So you see, Mr. Blount, I have really no choice. I am very sorry. And so is Constance—sorry to disappoint you. But there is really no help for it. Come, Connie, we must say good-bye to Mr. Blount now, and go home."

'Constance arose, slowly and with a perfunctory air, or as if she were in a dream. She gazed vaguely about her, and moved her hands in a groping way. I fancied she was going to fall, and quickly stepping forward, I took hold of one arm. At the same moment her mother grasped her by the other.

'"Constance," I said, passionately and almost violently, "come to me—come where you belong! Be my wife, so that I can protect you. Do not be afraid—come! All the spirits in hell shall not harm my wife!"

'It seemed to me that, as I spoke, she inclined towards me; her eyes rested on mine, and her lips murmured something scarcely articulate. She was on the brink of surrender; a touch more, and I would have her for ever.

'"Connie, my child," said Mrs. Cambryn's dry voice from the other side, "do not forget your duty—be yourself!"

'She wavered between us for a moment; then she gently but decidedly drew her arm away from me, and went over wholly to her mother.

'"Do you give me up?" said I, between my teeth.

'She was silent; but Mrs. Cambryn said, in a tone just touched with mockery—

'"Mr. Blount asked you a question, my child."

'Then Constance, with a mechanical, unmodulated utterance, and looking rather at her mother than at me, said—

'"It is hardly generous of you to press me so, Mr. Blount. I feel a great esteem for you, but I could never be your wife under any circumstances. I have a duty to perform, and my heart as well as my will are set upon it. Please do not ask me any more; do not—not ——"

'She ceased, as a child might have done, who had forgotten the piece it had been set to learn; and her face assumed a vacant expression. Her mother drew her away, and they walked down the avenue to the gate, leaving me standing at the summer-house door. Just before they passed out of sight, Mrs. Cambryn turned partly round, and courteously waved the *North American Review* at me; but Constance moved mechanically on, and made no sign.'

CHAPTER III.

'This interview, as you may suppose, changed my purpose of settling in the village; I wanted to be off again, and to be off as far as possible. That night, before I went to bed, I determined to put up my house and farm for sale, and meanwhile to put the thickness of the earth between me and Constance.

'But the next morning I modified this intention somewhat. The truth was, of course, that I lacked courage to definitely see the last of her before circumstances should make it compulsory; but equally, of course, I was

fertile in sophistries to disguise that weakness. I said to myself that it would be undignified to run away headlong because a girl had refused to marry me. I owed it to my self-respect to prove that I could live without her. I would not be driven from pillar to post by anybody. Mrs. Cambryn, at all events, would desire and expect that I should disappear; well, there would be some pleasure in disappointing her. Besides, I was curious to see how this affair would turn out; whether Mr. Cambryn Fellowes would actually appear as he had promised, and, if so, whether he would talk as confidently as he had written. My private opinion concerning him was that he was an adventurer, who was speculating upon the folly of Mrs. Cambryn as revealed in her newspaper advertisements. Probably, therefore, he would merely attempt to get some money out of her, and then, whether successful or not, in his design, decamp. I was curious to see how Mrs. Cambryn would conduct herself upon that. Could she abandon her schemes, or would she try some other method? Whatever she did, I told myself I should lose nothing by waiting. Anything might happen; among other things, she might lose or relinquish her extraordinary influence over her daughter. That it was an unlawful, an abnormal influence, I was convinced; it was exercised by dint of some occult power, which a hundred or two years ago would have put Mrs. Cambryn in danger of being burnt as a witch. As this idea crossed my mind, I came near wishing that we

had been born in the seventeenth century. Poor Constance! for such wrongs as hers what punishment would be too severe? There could be no doubt that she had been constrained to act and speak in opposition to her own will. I began to consider whether a forcible elopement might not be my most righteous course under the circumstances. Would not the law, upon such evidence as I could adduce, declare her mother to be not a fit and proper person to be intrusted with the care of her? Might this not be worth trying? If I could only get Constance away, beyond her mother's reach, I felt sure that she would turn wholly to me, and be glad to forget all else.

'For about a week, during which I remained on my farm, I neither saw nor heard anything of the Cambryns; but at the end of that time I was astonished to receive a note, written by Constance herself, inviting me to supper at their home on the following evening. No allusion was made to our last interview; she wrote as if no such crisis had occurred, Her mother sent her regards. It was very strange. Had Mrs. Cambryn reconsidered her behaviour? Was she coming to her senses? Be that as it might, I was not long in making up my mind to accept the invitation.

'Accordingly, at the appointed time, I walked over to the house. It was in October, and the evenings were long: at half-past six it was entirely dark. The lamps were not lit in the room which I entered, and at first I could

distinguish nothing. Then a figure arose, and spoke in Mrs. Cambryn's voice, bidding me good-evening. I could now perceive a presence which I knew to be Constance; and with her I also exchanged greetings. Then there was a momentary pause. I had an obscure sensation that there was someone else in the room; but I could see no one.

'"Mr. Blount, let me make you acquainted with Mr. Cambryn Fellowes," said Mrs. Cambryn. "Mr. Fellowes arrived from England yesterday: Mr. Blount, Mr. Fellowes."

'Hereupon there was a movement in a part of the room near where Constance was sitting; Mr. Fellowes had apparently risen, and may, for aught I know, have been making me a bow. "Happy to see you, Mr. Blount," he said, in an easy and somewhat resonant tone. I judged from the sound that he might be a man of forty; and I imagined him as of a bluff, bulky aspect, with a red beard and a florid complexion.

'"You have the advantage of me, sir," I said; "I can hear you but I can't see you."

'"There is a great deal in a voice," returned he; "a face may mislead, a voice seldom."

'"Still, faces are useful."

'"Oh, decidedly!" said he, with a laugh; a quick, noisy laugh, that was soon over and not contagious. "Yes, decidedly faces are useful, if only to kiss our sweethearts on!"

'It appeared to me that this person had contrived to make himself very much at home in a comparatively short time. I said no more; but at this juncture the servant brought in the astral lamp. My eyes fell first on Constance. She was shading her face from the light with her hand; her colour seemed to be higher than usual. Then I looked at Mr. Cambryn Fellowes.

'He was not at all like what I had imagined.

'He was a rather short and slightly-built man, with thick black hair, small black eyes, and a pale complexion. Nevertheless, he was not unhandsome; I could conceive that a woman might think him attractive. He was well-dressed, and he carried with him a certain air of good-breeding, and the look of a man of the world. I must confess that, from what I had heard him say before I saw him, I had expected him to turn out a much more vulgar-looking person than he now seemed to be. He was considerably under forty, evidently; he might have been no more than thirty, as far as I could tell. His get-up was more English than his cast of countenance; upon the whole, I put him down as a gentleman's son and a cockney. A man of some ability, without doubt, and thoroughly master of such abilities as he had. His eyes were the blackest I ever saw, and very intense in their regard. I did not like them or him at all.

'We conversed, all of us, for a while, on

general topics; supper was presently announced, and we gathered round the little table. Mr. Fellowes and Mrs. Cambryn were the principal talkers. The former had much to say on every subject, and said it cleverly and with *aplomb*. His voice always surprised me, it was so full and assured, and his periods were so voluble and easy. He favoured me with a good deal of attention; I saw that he was taking my measure, and I was foolish enough to be rather gratified at his seeming to find some difficulty in making me out. Towards Constance he adopted a jocose air of gallantry; as if he considered her to be an ordinary pretty girl, such as he had been accustomed to see all his life, and not to consider of especial importance. His line with Mrs. Cambryn, on the other hand, was respectfully complimentary; he had already discovered that she prided herself upon her understanding, and he flattered her upon that score with no little discretion and ingenuity. They were manifestly on the best of terms with each other.

"'What a grand country this is!' exclaimed Mr. Fellowes, with his loud, firm voice. 'Thanks, Mrs. Cambryn—one more baked apple, please; and perhaps Mademoiselle will favour me with the cream-jug. A grand country. Always been my desire to come here. Your stump orators are in the right, Mrs. Cambryn; it is the country of the future!'

"'The future is nothing without the past,' said the lady.

'"True! remarkably true. Yes, where would America be if it hadn't been for England? Very true. Still, you know, here America is, an accomplished fact—a palpable existence; here she is, and I like her! The land of the future. Have you been over on our side of the Atlantic, Mr. Blount? Yours is a good old English name."

'"It won't do to judge people in America on the testimony of their names," I said. "It is very easy to get your name changed here, and to sail under borrowed colours."

'"Dear me! really!" rejoined Mr. Fellowes, with his abrupt laugh. He was looking into the cream-jug as he spoke; but a moment later he looked up and sent me a remarkably keen glance. "Well, Blount is a fine old name, you know," he added.

'"Mr. Blount mustn't give you a wrong impression," put in Mrs. Cambryn. "He comes from one of the first families of Virginia. His ancestors fought side by side with Washington and Lee in our Revolution. They are as old as the Cambryns, I dare say."

'"Oh, Cambryn is Welsh—we are Welsh, you know," returned Mr. Fellowes. He again glanced at me as he said "we." "The Welsh, you know, are the real *bona fide* old Britons, —they and the Cornish men. Yes, we are Welsh."

'"You are a relation of Mrs. Cambryn, I have heard," said I.

'"Yes; I'm a relation, I'm happy to say.

My mother was a niece of Mr. Cambryn, not Edward Cambryn,—the English Cambryn. That makes me a sort of cousin, I fancy. Miss Constance, you are my American cousin! Ever see Sothern, Mrs. Cambryn? Immense actor—immense! Or perhaps you don't care for the Drama?"

'"Oh, I approve of good acting," Mrs. Cambryn said. "When we go to Boston or New York we generally visit some theatre. But I don't think Americans make quite such a business of theatre-going as I believe you do in London."

'"Don't know about that; all I can say is, our best actors all come over here, and then the difficulty is to get them back again. The Drama has a grand future in America, I fancy. I've been told, by-the-by, that all American girls go on to the stage for a year or so—that it's a regular part of their education. Is that true, Miss Constance? Have you ever appeared before the footlights?"

'"No," said Constance, gravely.

'"Mr. Fellowes is joking, of course," interposed Mrs. Cambryn, smilingly.

'"No, I'm only betraying my insular ignorance," rejoined he, with a commendable absence of embarrassment. "That's one reason I like to be here—I can learn something, and correct false impressions. The greatest actress of modern times—Miss Cushman—was an American lady, you know. So Miss Constance has never felt any histrionic impulses?"

'"I did not say that," she replied.

'Mrs. Cambryn continued to smile. "Constance will, I hope, play a part on a wider stage than that of—than that of a theatre," she remarked, complacently.

'"All the world's a stage," quoted Mr. Fellowes. "I am inclined to think my American cousin will win distinction wherever she appears. I shall always be ready to applaud her, for one."

'"Do you know Lord Roscoe?" I inquired.

'"Not personally; we're not exactly on terms, if you know what I mean. But apart from the little family affairs that have separated us, I believe he's a capital fellow. He's an English gentleman, if you know what I mean. But perhaps you're acquainted with him yourself?"

'"No. But as he is likely to be brought into close relations with Mrs. and Miss Cambryn, I was interested to hear about him."

'"Nothing is decided as yet," Mrs. Cambryn interposed. "What I said about Lord Roscoe was only an indication that I bore him no ill-will, and would be willing to recompense him for his dispossession in the only way open to me. So far as we are concerned, it will be immaterial whether Constance is married to him, or to some other English nobleman."

'"If you please, Mamma, I would rather not have that subject discussed now," said Constance, with a rather uneasy side-glance at me.

'"Miss Constance doesn't wish to anticipate her misfortunes," Fellowes added, jocosely. "If she marry a nobleman to-morrow, the less said about it to-day the better!"

'"I never wish to be married at all!" exclaimed she, with sudden fire, turning upon him indignantly.

'"Oh, I say! that's a little too hard on our sex," protested Fellowes, laughing.

'"Miss Cambryn may have been thinking less of men in general than of Englishmen in particular," I observed.

'"Ah, that's only because she doesn't know us well enough!" was his resonant retort. "When she knows us better, she'll alter her views concerning matrimony. I hope to make you think more kindly of Englishmen before I see the last of you, Miss Constance. They're very jolly sort of fellows when you know them!"

'"I did not think unkindly of Englishmen before seeing you," she replied, with a clever ambiguity of phrase scarcely characteristic of her. Fellowes appeared not to perceive the double interpretation of her words, and soon began to talk to Mrs. Cambryn about something else. When supper was over, and we had sat a little while by the open parlour windows, I rose to take my leave.

'"I am glad you came, Mr. Blount," said Mrs. Cambryn, giving me her hand. "I thought you would like to meet Mr. Fellowes."

'"It was kind of you to think of that," I

replied, not cordially, for I was not in a heavenly humour. "But I fear I shall not be able to profit by it, as I shall be leaving in a few days."

'"Don't say that; I should be so sorry!"

'"I should think Mr. Blount would wish to leave. It is not a pleasant place. What should he care to stay for?" It was Constance who said this.

'Mrs. Cambryn looked annoyed. "Certainly Mr. Blount must do what he likes best," she said. "Possibly we may meet him again in England."

'"Possibly you may!" I returned, with a smile. "Good-bye, Constance."

'She put her hand in mine without speaking. Her eyes met mine. Just as she was relinquishing her grasp, she tightened it again suddenly, for a moment; and a strange wild look shone in her eyes. The next moment she withdrew her hand, turned away, and walked to another part of the room, where she sat down. I bowed slightly to Fellowes, and took my departure.

'I could not be sure whether or not I understood the situation, as indicated by the events of this evening. Why had Mrs. Cambryn wished me to meet Fellowes? Was it in order that she might have the triumph of showing me that her expectations of his coming had been fulfilled, and that, in consequence, her further hopes would be gratified likewise? That would be ordinary feminine malice; but

Mrs. Cambryn ought to have a deeper motive than that in her actions. Had she wished to assure me anew of Constance's indifference to me? If so, she had not succeeded; I was more than ever assured of the contrary. Could it be, then, that she really desired to resume friendly intercourse with me? But what advantage could come to her from my friendship? Did she believe that she could retain me as a second string to her bow, to be used in case she failed to recover the estates? In that case she misjudged me; I was perhaps capable of making Constance elope with me; but if I relinquished her so far as to let her begin her pursuit of Lord Roscoe, or of any other man, I was resolved never afterwards to see or speak to her; I had sense enough, I thought, not to play second fiddle to anybody. As to Fellowes, I fancied I comprehended him tolerably well. He had come out here to "prospect," his object was to make money—nothing more and nothing else. He might or might not have any grounds for anticipating that Mrs. Cambryn would succeed in her claim; if he did, he would be sure so to arrange matters as to secure a good share of the profits to himself; if he did not, he would simply mulct her of as large a sum as her credulity would allow him, and then take himself off. I had not an atom of confidence in his honesty and good faith. He might, as far as I knew or cared, be the "sort of cousin" of the English Cambryns that he said he was: but I was convinced that he was a

black sheep, a detrimental, and that his chief means of existence were his wits. The fact of his evident inability to appreciate the unique charm and beauty of Constance, not to mention her equally manifest aversion to him—these considerations, while they were in no sense objectionable to me as far as I personally was concerned, only confirmed my idea of his disreputability. It was not to be supposed that such a man as he could either know the value of a true woman, or be able to render himself acceptable to her.

'While I was meditating thus, and walking slowly homewards, smoking a cigar, I heard a quick step along the road behind me, and a minute afterwards I was joined by Fellowes himself.

'"Good evening again, Mr. Blount," said he. "I smelt your cigar as I came on, and I thought I'd take the liberty to get a light from you. What capital cigars you Americans smoke! Thanks, very much. My road is the same as yours for half a mile, I think."

'"I won't detain you; I like to walk slowly."

'"So do I—when nothing is to be gained by walking fast! Charming people our friends the Cambryns. Old friends of yours, I fancy?"

'"Chance acquaintances only."

'"Oh, I say! If I know anything about women, that young lady would have a different tale to tell. If you're not engaged to her, I fancy it's your fault!"

"At all events, it is none of your business."

"Quite right; but I had no intention to offend. I shouldn't have ventured the remark if I hadn't thought my cousinship to the lady might excuse it. But if I were in love with a girl like that (which is absurd, of course—I'm not a marrying man), I would see Lord Roscoe or any other man dashed before I'd let him have her. But it's none of my business, as you say. Well, she'll be a match for a better man than either of us when she's in possession of her estates."

'Much as I disliked Mr. Fellowes, and offensive though his conversation was to me, I thought I might possibly find out something about him which it would be worth while to know, by encouraging him to talk. So I asked him whether he entertained any expectations of the success of Mrs. Cambryn's enterprise?

"That's a question that I should be forced to say 'Yes' to, as a mere matter of etiquette, apart from private opinion," he replied; "I am counsel for the claimant, you know. But between you and me, Mr. Blount, I may remark that I consider the claim a sound one; and I wouldn't be in Lord Roscoe's shoes for a good deal. There is no doubt that Edward Cambryn owned the estates; that he made a will; and that this will was in favour of his cousin Philip's heirs or assigns. The only hitch is, to find out where the will has got to. We know that he was in the habit of carrying it about his person; that he was eccentric in his habits; and that he

was subject to disease of the heart. Therefore he may have died suddenly anywhere; and the probability is that the will was in his pocket when he died. That's our case as it stands now."

'"It doesn't stand very well, then. After forty years, how are you going to find the body? and, supposing that done, what likelihood is there that the will would have been allowed to remain with it?"

'"Well, there is this in our favour; that if any other party had come into possession of it, we must have heard of it."

'"Why so?"

'"Simply because the person who had it would have advertised it, or, if he was in want of money, would have sold it by private treaty either to Lord Roscoe or to our friends here. Neither of these things has been done; consequently the inference is that the will is still undiscovered."

'"And likely to remain so."

'"Well, as touching that—as touching that. . . . You may be aware that our friends here have spiritualistic proclivities?"

'"Indeed?"

'"Yes; and they think they can do a good deal with it."

'"Are you of their opinion?"

'"I don't know that I am more credulous than most men; still, I must say that I have seen some queer things—some very queer things indeed. My cousin Miss Constance is a

medium, I understand. Now, there is such a thing as a trance medium—I believe that is the term; and I have known trance mediums to do some very clever things. I have known them to read a sealed letter; and to tell the place where a bundle of bank-notes was hidden. I call that very clever."

'"You have some acquaintance with spiritualism on your own account, I see."

'"I have gone into a good many things, Mr. Blount; and I may go into a good many more before I die."

'"And you expect that, by using Miss Cambryn as a trance medium, you may get at the whereabouts of this will? Will Mrs. Cambryn authorise that proceeding?"

'"I think," said Fellowes, slowly, as if weighing his words, "that Mrs. Cambryn would authorise anything that seemed to offer a chance of finding that will."

'By this time we had arrived at my house. During the last two or three minutes I had come to a certain determination, and I acted upon it without delay.

'"Step in a little while, Mr. Fellowes," I said, "and I will give you a pretty fair glass of brandy."

'"You are very hospitable; thanks, I will." I opened the door, and we went in together. I ushered my guest into the dining-room, and produced the decanter. Mr. Fellowes helped himself to a moderately stiff glass, sipped it, and then crossed his legs comfortably in his

chair. I stood with my back against the mantel-piece, in front of him; having placed the lamp so as to throw a good light upon his face.

"Capital brandy," observed Mr. Fellowes; "capital! May I ask you where you get it?"

"It's some I imported from France. Now, as I have answered your question, perhaps you will answer one for me?"

"Delighted! say on."

"I am going to ask you a question, and then to make a proposition."

"Your exordium is somewhat formal, but I am guileless and tractable—capital cognac, indeed!"

"In the first place, I always like to know whom I have to do with. Who are you, Mr. Fellowes?"

"I am a person who is at present strongly disposed to be on good terms with Mr. Blount."

"How long have you been a sort of cousin of Mrs. Cambryn?"

"Ever since I have been able to remember; and that is, ever since I came to a full comprehension of the fact that Mrs. Cambryn existed."

"No one hears you but myself, Mr. Fellowes; there are only two servants in the house, and they are asleep at the top of it."

"I am a very respectable man, and my foremost aspiration is to live respectably. I wish to lead a harmless and upright life. I shall do all my best for my clients, whoever

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may be so uncharitable as to think otherwise."

'"Have you received your retaining fee?"

'"Professional etiquette, Mr. Blount ——"

'"I know; but it need make no difference to you by whom the fee is paid, as long as you get it."

'"Well, if that be your American custom—I suppose not."

'"How much is it?"

'"That depends upon what would be required of me."

'"Only that your recollection of the fact of your cousinship should be kept permanently in abeyance, and that you cease to appear in this part of the world, or to hold any communication with anyone who lives here."

'"That would be very arduous. I could only think of undertaking it to oblige you. It would really put you under a great obligation. For one thing, it would save you the trouble of vacating the premises yourself. Oh, I have my eyes open; I am not unaware which way the cat jumps! I shouldn't be surprised to learn, for instance (as we say at the Bar), that you would like to convince me of the expediency of taking Mamma Cambryn along with me! What! Ha, ha!"

'"It's my business to propose the conditions; all you have to do is to state your terms. As it is getting late, and I am in the habit of going to bed early, I'll thank you to do so at once."

'"Really, this precipitation is hardly considerate; I ought to have more time to reflect upon the matter. However, to oblige you, I will put it roughly, at ten thousand pounds; contingent expenses of course not included."

'"I will give you ten thousand dollars, Mr. Fellowes. The same to cover all demands, past, present, or to come."

'"Ten thousand dollars! Ha, ha! You evidently mistake the sort of man I am. Remember, I have the honour of the English Bar to maintain. I couldn't think of so much as stirring in the matter for less than five thousand quid down!"

'"I think the sort of Bar you have been accustomed to stand at, Mr. Fellowes, will excuse you for having obliged me in this instance. However, by way of requiting your courtesy, I will allow you your steamer-passage here and back in addition. It's to take or to leave."

'He took another swallow from his tumbler, and meditated.

'"I hardly think it would be worth my while," he said at last. "I really believe in the thing, you see; and all I have told you about it is true. It's a great chance to throw away—for ten thousand dollars."

'"Just as you like," I remarked, indifferently. "I'm not sure but that I should be a loser by the transaction after all. My prospects are entirely uncertain, while yours, as far as they go, would be sure."

'"Say three thousand pounds!"

"No!"

'There was another pause. I leaned back against the mantel-piece with as indifferent an air as I could assume; though I believe, if the fellow held out, I would actually have given him all he asked. Finally he got up, and said—

'"I must think about this. You must give me a week to turn it over. I'll tell you my decision in a week. It's a devilish hard bargain!"

'"I will give you three days," I replied; "but I give you warning that you may not find me of the same mind at the end of that time. But three days from this hour you may call here again; meanwhile, I advise you to keep out of my way!"

'"It's a deuced hard bargain!" he repeated, as I showed him out of the door.'

CHAPTER IV.

'I DID not leave the house during the three days that followed this interview with Mr. Fellowes. I was not in a state of mind to render myself agreeable to my fellow-creatures, still less to take pleasure in their society. I had made the proposal to Fellowes on the spur of the moment; and though I had not much doubt that he would accede to it in the end, it was by no means clear to me whether or not his departure would bring me any nearer to

Constance. Mrs. Cambryn would still be in the way; and though, when the truth was revealed about Fellowes, she ought in reason to acknowledge the folly and futility of the whole affair, yet, when a person—and especially a woman—is under the dominion of spiritualism, reason is the last thing to be expected from her. Perhaps this rebuff would only confirm her in her obstinacy. She would regard me as the author rather than the averter of the mischief, and would perhaps decline even to enrich herself at my expense. And I had no ground for hope that Constance would be any less under her mother's influence now than heretofore.

'Nevertheless, I should have the satisfaction of knowing that I had saved them from becoming the victims of a fortune-hunter; and I solaced my ill-humour as well as I could with this idea. I occupied part of my leisure in drawing up a document for Fellowes to sign on the receipt of his ten thousand dollars. It declared that the person calling himself Arthur Cambryn Fellowes did hereby acknowledge that he was a delusion and a snare; that he was not a kind of cousin of the Cambryns, and that his description of himself as an English barrister was purely imaginary; that his sole object in coming to the village of Northmere had been to defraud the inhabitants thereof, or some of them, of their money, by dint of fraud and deception; and that now, in consideration of the sum of ten thousand dollars paid to

him, he solemnly engaged, under penalties, to take himself instantly out of the way, and never on any account to let himself be heard of again; witness his hand and seal. I wrote and rewrote this until I had got the wording of it to suit me; and then I locked it up in my desk and tried to be patient. But there was no patience in me.

'On the morning of the third day, when my nervousness and irritability were at their height, an unexpected thing happened. I received through the post a large envelope, endorsed "Department of State, Washington, D.C.," on opening which there appeared an ample spread of foolscap, embellished with seals and stamps, of different sizes and colours, together with a writing to the effect that Henry Blount was hereby appointed Consul for the United States at the port of Hamburg, North Germany; and the sooner he repaired thither, the better pleased would Uncle Sam be. At first I was at a loss to conceive how I had happened to become the recipient of such an honour; but presently I recollected that, in a fit of idleness eighteen months before, I had amused myself by applying to the then Secretary of State for some foreign appointment—I cared not what. The matter had subsequently gone out of my mind; I had never expected the application to succeed; and my discovery of Northmere and what it contained, soon afterwards, turned my attention to questions anything but political. Here, however, after all these months, was diplo-

matic greatness thrust upon me; it came at a pregnant moment! Should I accept it or decline it? I took out the other document, my own composition, from my desk, laid the two side by side, lit a cigar, and pondered. If Fellowes refused to be extinguished, I could hardly do better (after having given him a taste of my Mexican riding-whip) than go and protect the interests of my country at Hamburg. But suppose Fellowes agreed to extinction—what then? Why then, thought I, I will accept it still; for if I succeed in inducing Constance to marry me, we shall be more secure from the attacks of her mother there than here; while if I don't succeed, perhaps a consulship may console me for a broken heart. I shall need something to relieve my feelings upon; and doubtless a bout at scolding drunken sailors would answer as well as anything else. Having arrived at this conclusion, I immediately sat down and wrote off my acknowledgments and respects to Washington; and when I had posted it, and thus decided my fate for the next few years as far as the public part of it was concerned—after this I slowly devoured my solitary supper, and wondered how soon Mr. Fellowes would ring the door bell.

'There was a clock in my dining-room (my dining-room and my sitting-room were one in those bachelor days); there was a clock, then, on the mantel-piece, small in size and homely in appearance, but possessing the most exasperatingly self-complacent tick that ever mortal

clock had! On this evening the sound was particularly intolerable; and the minute-hand moved as slowly as if it had undertaken the hour-hand's business, while the latter, so far as I could perceive, did not move at all. In order to put the matter beyond dispute, I at length stopped the pendulum; but now the dead silence was almost worse than the ticking. I walked up and down the room as feverishly as a man who had spent his last penny in a lottery ticket; my nerves felt like violin strings set out of tune; my ears and my faculties were unnaturally on the alert; the clock being stopped I could not measure time; but it seemed to me it must be after midnight. I opened the window and looked out.

'It was a fine October night, cool and still; but there was a haze, which did not amount to cloudiness, over the sky, so that the earth was very dark. The silence was remarkable; I felt inclined to break it with the loudest shout that I could deliver myself of. But no; I would wait till Mr. Fellowes appeared for that; as he walked up the path I would greet him with such a yell as he would not hear again this side the Rocky Mountains. But he did not walk up the path; would he walk up it at all? Was it possible that he would reject the offer, and refuse to sign the laboriously humiliating confession which I had prepared for him? Could it be that, in my unwillingness to be unduly cheated by a blackguard, I had really driven too hard a bargain with him? had really named

a less sum than it would be worth his while to accept? Such a thought was unbearable. I would have given him the ten thousand pounds of his original demand twice over, sooner than be defeated by so paltry an error. But pshaw! Of course he would come; I would make him a present of my sentiments at having been kept so long waiting.

'He did not come; never, surely, had he been longed for with ardour so unfeigned as on that evening. How still it was! there was not so much as a frog to spare a croak. Hark! was that the sound of a carriage wheel on some remote road? There again! Yes, that was the tire of some belated waggon grinding against a flinty rut a mile away; perhaps two miles. And hark! what was that? a railway whistle? It was curious how much those whistles, when heard from a distance, sounded like a human scream. This one, especially, had sounded very human; nay, I could almost have said, feminine—the scream of a girl, very faint, very far off, but audible. A railway whistle—the scream of a girl; which was it? The railway whistle, of course. Wait a moment, though; there was no railway in the direction from which this sound had seemed to come. The railway was on the other side of the village. True, but it was always difficult to judge from whereabouts a sound of that kind came, whether from before or behind, from this side or from that. Ay, but was there any train at this hour? Not that I knew of. There was a night express to

Worcester, but that went at eight o'clock. Well, how did I know that it was not eight o'clock now? The clock had stopped—when? I turned to look at it. The motionless hands marked a quarter before nine. So the night-express theory would not do.

'The grinding of a wheel against a stone; a girl's scream; Fellowes absent from his appointment; what did it all mean? My feverish excitement had suddenly cooled down; I felt remarkably quiet and meditative. I closed the window, took my hat and stick, and leaving the house, walked rapidly in the direction of the Cambryns' farm.

'All the way as I walked I still kept expecting to hear a step coming to meet me along the dark road, and to discern the low active figure of my friend Fellowes, innocently hastening to get his ten thousand dollars. Catastrophes of a really palpable and dramatic kind happen so seldom in a man's life, that his first impulse is to disbelieve in them. But no step came. My own feet rustled sharply amidst the fallen leaves, and sometimes my tread echoed back from the unlighted front of a lonely wayside house; but no one besides myself was stirring. The whole world seemed asleep, or deserted by its inhabitants; but I was wide awake enough to make up for a world of lethargy. Was it midnight, or after? Was I losing irrevocable time, or was I making a fool of myself? Impossible to know yet; but I should know soon.

'Turning the corner of the little plot of pines, I came in view of the house at last; the parlour windows were alight. At first, this gave me a feeling of relief; there is something reassuring in the sober illumination of a household lamp. But I immediately reflected that a light at this time of night, in a house whose inmates kept such early hours as did the Cambryns, was a phenomenon to be surprised at rather than a circumstance to be gratified by. Next came the thought—perhaps they are having a *séance!* Spiritualistic *séances* were, to be sure, generally held in the dark; but this might be an intermission; or the spirits might have taken their leave for the night. If so, and if Fellowes were with them, I should encounter him when he came out. I waited in this expectation for several minutes.

'But nothing happened; no change took place; no figure crossed the windows or appeared at the door. By-and-by I came forward from the gate, where I had been standing, and approached the house. When I got near the porch, I found that I lacked courage to knock at the door, and end my misgivings at once; and not without a sense of self-contempt, I found myself stealing across the grass-plot to take a peep through the casement. Partly screening myself behind a standard rosebush, I looked cautiously in. There was only one person in the room—Mrs. Cambryn. She was sitting with her back to the window, in a low chair,

and was apparently reading; but after I had stared at her for a while, in a state of mind which my increasing dismay rendered for the moment little better than idiotic, she moved uneasily, and presently turned in her seat, and I saw her face, with distended eyes, gazing fearfully out at me. She could not, of course, discern any object outside the window-pane; the vacancy of her gaze was evidence enough of that; but she seemed to have felt my look; and the sinking at my own heart was reflected in her own stealthy and terrified expression. And yet—it might be all my imagination! At all events, I would bear the suspense no longer; so I approached the window and rapped upon it briskly.'

CHAPTER V.

'SHE got up as if she had been galvanised, and hurried to the window with the blundering step of those whose thoughts have left their bodies behind. With hands, the trembling of which was perceptible, she raised the sash and peered out.

'"Is that you, daughter? Connie, is that you?"

'"It is I, Mrs. Cambryn. Constance is not here, then?"

'"Mr. Blount! What is the matter—tell me at once! She went out quite four hours ago. Have you met them?"

'"I know nothing about her. Who was with her—Fellowes?"

'"Yes; but do come in, Mr. Blount. You have startled me dreadfully, and I have been feeling nervous for some time." I put my knee on the sill and stepped into the room. "They went out just for a turn in the shrubbery," she said. "That was at nine o'clock—it is after one now. I can't think where they can be. They have not been at your house at all?"

'"No. You had better keep calm, Mrs. Cambryn, so that we may think what can be done. What had you been doing before they went out?"

'"Oh, we had been having a *séance*—a most interesting and important one. Mr. Fellowes, you know, has great power; he can do anything with Connie. He has been operating upon her every day for some time past. We had some most valuable results. His magnetic power is wonderful."

'"What did your daughter have on when she went out?"

'"Just her hat and cloak; I made her put on her cloak, because these October nights are so cool. But four hours seems such a long time!"

'"Had Fellowes been here all day?"

'"Oh, no; he came just before tea—about six. He had been here for half an hour or so in the forenoon. I was afraid some accident might have happened either to him or to her, and ——"

'"Did he come this evening on foot or in a waggon?"

'"On foot—or at least I think so; but once or twice he has come in a waggon and put it up in the barn at the corner of the field below. Oh, do you think it could have been a carriage accident? He was always wanting Connie to drive with him, but she would not. She behaved very ungraciously to him, I must say—except when he had magnetised her; then she was much more manageable. Oh, dear! I hope he hasn't been thrown out. Oh, what should we do if he has been thrown out and killed! And just as we were getting on so well!"

'"Mrs. Cambryn, you're not fit to have a daughter. What would you do if Constance was abducted? That is the question now?"

'"What do you mean? By whom?"

'"By a blackguard adventurer. . . . Was it a part of your plan that Fellowes should be your daughter's husband?"

'"Mr. Blount! He Connie's husband!—how can you speak of such a thing! I'd—I'd sooner have her to marry you. Connie is to be the wife of a nobleman."

'"You may consider yourself very lucky if she becomes the wife of a fortune-hunter. Do you know what Mr. Fellowes is?" And then I told her, in as few and as forcible words as I could use, about my interview with him three days before; and I finished by mentioning the sounds I had heard this night. "My belief is,"

I added, "that he has taken her off, for reasons and by means which you ought to know better than I; and this is the end of your grand scheme of recovering your English estates!"

'Up to this moment I had felt only anger and uncharitableness towards Mrs. Cambryn; but after I had said these words I could not help pitying her. She looked at me with an appalled gaze for a little, and then sank down in a strengthless way upon a chair. I suppose the realisation of all the folly, wrong, and profanation of which she had been guilty came over her all at once. She made no attempt to assert herself, or to defend her conduct. She was tremulous, helpless, and full of terror. She had set her soul so entirely upon this enterprise that when this disastrous turn of events came she had nothing on which to support herself. I had thought that she would be slow to believe the worst; that she would struggle against conviction to the last. But it was not so. Heaven knows what she and Fellowes, between them, may have done to Constance, in their accursed eagerness to pierce the veil of human limitations and to discover what was hidden. At all events, the spectacle of her present wretchedness was more than I cared to dwell upon.

'"Something must be done immediately," I said. "Have you any idea from anything you have noticed where they are likely to have gone?"

'"I cannot think of anything; I never dreamed of such a thing as this. I should think

the spirits might have forewarned me!" she moaned out.

'"You think she went against her will?"

'"I don't know; and he was able to control her will, you know."

'"Did they have any money with them?"

'"Not that I know of. Mr. Fellowes had said we should need money. He had offered to manage our money affairs for us; and he knew —he found out—that Constance had a few thousand dollars of her own in the Beacon Hill Bank in Boston."

'"Then that will be the first place to go for news of them. Do you authorise me to go after them and take her from him?"

'"Oh, if you only would, Mr. Blount! I can do nothing; I feel as if I were going to die. Connie always wanted to marry you, and that is the truth; but the spirits seemed to be so decidedly opposed to it that I could not go against them. She was very unhappy—sometimes she was almost desperate; but generally I could control her, she was so susceptible of spiritual influences. I can't think how this happened. Mr. Fellowes never showed the least partiality to her, except as a means of finding out the truth; and, as I say, she seemed positively to dislike him when she was in her natural state."

'"If I overtake them, and am in time to save her—which I very much doubt—I may as well tell you that you will never see her again except as my wife. It will be a special mercy

of Providence if you have not ruined her, body and soul both, with your unholy doings. You will never have the opportunity to carry on the work, I promise you that. Now what you have to do is simple enough. You must stay here and communicate to me any news of any kind that may reach you about them. Constance may succeed in writing to you, or some clue may turn up. Telegraph to the Beacon Hill Bank. My address will always be known there, and they can forward me your messages. I shall drive to Worcester to-night, so as to get the first train in the morning. Well, good-bye, Mrs. Cambryn. I will send you word of my success or failure; but I don't think we shall be likely to meet again soon."

'"You needn't upbraid me, Mr. Blount," she said, feebly. "I see that I was wrong; but what was I to do? If one is not to believe the spirits, what can one believe? But I feel I have got a death-blow, and, whether you find Constance or not, I shall not last much longer. I should be glad to know that she is safely your wife. Good-bye!"

'So I left her with no more words, and hurried down to the livery stables of the village hotel. After arousing the men there, and ordering a horse and a light waggon, I questioned them as to whether Fellowes had been there that day, and learned that he had hired a team to go, as he said, to the neighbouring town of Cranmead, where he would remain all night. He had started shortly before six o'clock.

Cranmead was in a direction opposite to Worcester; but I did not allow this to alter my plans. It was merely an attempt to throw pursuit off the scent. They must, I was convinced, have gone to Boston. It was now about half-past two. I had eighteen miles to drive, and only two and a half hours to do it in, if I was to catch the first train. With a good horse and a smooth road that would have been easy; but unfortunately I had neither. Nevertheless, I set out.

'In two hours and three quarters I drove up to the Worcester Station, having missed my train. The next train did not start until half-past eight. I spent most of the intervening time in making unsuccessful inquiries after some trace of the fugitives. Nobody seemed to have seen them. I sent a telegram to the Boston terminus to stop them if they alighted there; and finally lay down to get an hour's sleep. The train came in a little behind time; and several delays occurred in the journey. It was nearly eleven before I reached Boston. I took a fly to the Beacon Hill Bank; but I knew that I should be too late.

'Mr. Dyke, the manager, a firm, square-looking man, with the kindest heart in town, received me in his private room.

'"Have you paid out a large sum of money this morning?" I asked him, while he shook my hand.

'"In one draft? But sit down, Mr. Blount."

'"I am in a hurry. Yes, in one payment."

'"We paid seven thousand dollars to one of the depositors about an hour ago. Why do you make the inquiry?"

'"To Miss Constance Cambryn?"

'"Exactly."

'"To her personally, or to her order?"

'"To the young lady in person. She sat in that chair while the money was being drawn."

'"How was she looking?"

'"Somewhat pale and weary, and her manner was constrained."

'"Did she tell you what she wanted the money for?"

'"I did not inquire; but I apprehended from something that fell from her that she contemplated taking an European trip—with Mrs. Cambryn, I presume."

'"She had no companion with her? mentioned no one?"

'"No one whatever. May I ask if anything is wrong?"

'I gave Mr. Dyke a brief account of what had happened. "Do you think it will be possible to stop them before they leave the city?" I then asked him.

'"I am not sure whether it would be legal, even if possible," he replied. "It appears to be a case of elopement. The young lady is of age. She comes here and draws out her own deposit, as she has a perfect right to do. If this individual you mention makes her

his wife, I don't see what you can do. It is difficult to see why, if Miss Cambryn was acting in opposition to her own will, she would not have mentioned the fact when she was along here with me—an old friend of her mother's. She must have been aware that I would have protected her, if appealed to. No such appeal was made. Are you quite sure that you are correct in your supposition that she was averse to the young man? Girls are mysterious creatures, you know, Mr. Blount—very difficult to account for. I know as much as that; I have daughters. I apprehend that it may have been a love-match after all, in spite of appearances. Otherwise I can't understand it."

'"Neither do I understand it all. Heaven knows you may be right; as things look now, I almost hope you are!"

'"I am inclined to share your feeling. Meanwhile, every facility for tracing them that we can command shall be placed at your disposal. Poor girl!—may you succeed!"

'I ransacked Boston from top to bottom; but no vestige of either Fellowes or Constance came to light. After having kept a watch at every dock and railway station in the city for three days, I wrote a letter to Mrs. Cambryn, and engaged my own passage for Liverpool.'

CHAPTER VI.

'SEVERAL causes conspired to induce me to take this step. In the first place, it seemed probable that I should be more apt to light upon the fugitives in the Old World than in the New; for I could not conceive that Fellowes could have any other object in running off with Constance than to prosecute his designs upon the Cambryn estates. In the second place, after they had been together nearly a week, all the harm there was to be done might have been done; to find her now would not be to save her, if she needed saving. But upon this point I was resolutely sceptical. I did not allow myself to believe that Fellowes had not married her. He was, perhaps, capable (so far as his own moral nature was concerned) of betraying her; but beside that it seemed probable that his purposes would be best served by making her his wife—because in that case he would come legally into her inheritance, should it ever fall to her; besides this, I had faith in a good God in Heaven, who would not permit a villain to ruin an innocent girl deprived of all other than Divine protection. No, I could not credit the worst evil save upon proof unmistakable.

'And there was another reason for supposing the marriage, which I did not lose sight of, though there was small comfort in it, for my

selfish sake. Circumstances seemed to point with unmitigable obstinacy to the conclusion that Constance had not been the companion of Fellowes's flight against her own inclination. It was conceivable that he might be able to exert over her a terrifying or paralysing influence which should constrain her temporarily, or while in direct communication with him, to obey his will in her own despite; but how to account for the undeniable fact that she, apart from and, as far as could be known, quite independently of him, had nevertheless so punctually carried out what must have been his wishes? When she was alone with Mr. Dyke in his private office, surely, if she had wished it, she would have confided to him her trouble, and received immediate and adequate protection. Yet instead of that she had drawn out her money on a false or misleading pretext, and departed without saying one word which could lead to Fellowes's discovery or pursuit. Was she already married to him at that time, and therefore unwilling or ashamed to declare the truth? But even then she need not have lavished her fortune upon him, unless she had intended by its means to purchase of him her liberty—or unless she had loved him! Yes, incredible as it seemed, the rational conclusion from the evidence of facts was that she did love him, and that the appearance of aversion to him which she had made manifest to her mother and to me had been put forward by her with the deliberate intention of deceiving us.

That was the only logical result to which my meditations on the subject led me; though all the while I was powerless to comprehend how such transcendent fickleness and double-dealing could harbour in a nature which had been in all other respects so simple and straightforward.

'It was a heavy and discouraged heart, therefore, that I took with me to Liverpool. I spent about a week there in making further inquiries—not because I expected that anything would come of them, but because I did not wish to feel that any stone had been left unturned. Nothing came of my researches, except an acquaintance with Miss Blodgett's boarding-house, which might have sufficed to solace most mortal ills, but had only a superficial effect on mine. Before leaving England I obtained a letter of introduction to Lord Roscoe, and called on that nobleman, partly from curiosity, and partly from an idea that I might possibly learn something of the proceedings of the new claimant to the estate. His lordship was a broad-shouldered, light-haired Saxon, with blue eyes, an aquiline nose, and rather reserved manners; but it soon became evident that he had never so much as suspected that his property could ever belong to anyone else than himself. He took me out shooting with him, and complimented me on the accuracy of my aim; asked me, among other things, whether the City of Washington were not owned by England; gave me an excellent dinner, and an uncomfortable bed; and the

next morning dismissed me with a brief shake of the hand, and a very cold request that I should some time look him up again. I liked Lord Roscoe very well, and thought that he was much better suited to his position than Mr. Fellowes would have been.

'On leaving Liverpool I abandoned also all further expectation of seeing or hearing anything of Fellowes or Constance. I had done what I could, but they had escaped me, and gone out of my life for ever. What had occurred must permanently put an end to one part of my life—that which had to do with love and domestic happiness. But for a man still in the prime of his years, the world contained many things besides these that might afford him interest and occupation. I was by no means sorry that my consulship happened to interpose itself at this time between the gloomy currents of my thoughts. Probably few officials in that year went to their posts with a firmer determination to be efficient than that which animated the consul at Hamburg. I was a new broom, and I meant to sweep clean.

'But after the first impress of the life had worn off, I began to find it rather monotonous. Odd and picturesque incidents ever and anon occurred, but I was getting used to them; they all had more or less of a family resemblance. There was only one case, in the course of the first nine months, which stood out with any prominence in my memory, and I should not probably have recollected that had it not been for another

thing which happened afterwards. A sailor was brought before me by a voluble elderly personage, who described himself as the keeper of a lodging-house. His complaint was that the sailor had used his accommodations, and had then refused to pay for them, though admitting at the same time that he had the means to do so. And not only had he refused to pay, but he had heaped scandalous abuse upon the landlord.

'"Is what this man says true?" I demanded of the sailor, with a stern voice and brow.

'"Well, your honour, 'tis true in so far as this," he replied; "I did spend a night in his caboose, and I telled him I'd see him h'isted to the yard-arm before I'd pay him for it; because why? Because Davy Jones was in the next bunk!"

'At this the landlord launched out into a volley of expletives and protestations. Upon inquiring further into the matter I learned that the room in which the sailor lodged had been on the second floor, and had two doors, one of which was locked and barred; and since this door opened into a corner room, there was necessarily no other egress therefrom. The door had evidently not been opened for a long time—possibly not for many years: for the bars and locks were very rusty, and the keyholes (there were two) were filled with dust and rubbish, so that it was plain to see that no key had entered them for a period greater than the sailor would undertake to specify; but sufficient,

at all events, to starve a thousand times over any person who may have been shut up inside. It followed, therefore, by logical inference, that if anybody was inside, and was able to make his presence known by sounds and movements, then that person must be superior to ordinary human necessities, and therefore more than mortal. Such a supernatural being, the sailor averred, had occupied the locked-up room during the whole of the night which he had spent in the lodging-house; and it had kept up such a knocking and stirring about that he had not been able to get a wink of sleep, and had been scared half to death into the bargain. And this treatment he considered to be an ample equivalent for any demands the landlord might make of him in the way of payment.

'I now turned to the landlord for an explanation of this charge; and he met it with a total and explicit contradiction. Something in his manner, however, as well as a flavour of veracity in the countenance and diction of the sailor, led me to think that there might be more in the matter than superficially appeared; and I accordingly remanded the case, and informed the landlord that I would take occasion to call upon him after office hours that day, and judge for myself what the rights of the dispute really were.

'The address was in a poor quarter of the town, not far from the Hamburger Berg. It was a hot July evening when I found my way there; the population was for the most part out

of doors, and the windows of the houses were open. The house which I had come to see stood as one of a row of similar buildings; but there was a narrow, vacant space on each side of it; probably the structures which had occupied these spaces had fallen or been pulled down, so that the edifice in question was practically detached. It had an aged and slovenly appearance; the framework had partly given way here and there; there were depressions in the roof; and one of the chimneys had tumbled down. The door hung askew upon its hinges, and the jambs were soiled and greasy with the touch of many dirty hands and shabby shoulders. All the windows in the house were open except two; these appertained to a room on the second floor, in the corner at the back. Here the shutters were closed, and secured by bars of wood nailed across the outside. In the doorway one or two dingy persons, apparently lodgers, were standing or leaning. I inquired of them whether Herr Zschokke (the landlord) was at home?

'In a minute he made his appearance. He was a small bent man, dressed in a rusty and voluminous suit of black clothes, with an extraordinary tangle of grey hair all over his head and face. His eyebrows were very bushy, and the eyes deeply set underneath were bloodshot, but bright and quick. He greeted me with voluble compliments and apologies.

'"Your house seems to be in need of repair," I observed to him, in German.

'"Ah, beste Herr!" he replied, "I am so poor—I am not what I once was! Forty years ago I was a rich man; I owned many houses. I have been very unfortunate—it is dreadful! All my property leaves me. At length I am reduced to this poor building which you see. But even this, honoured sir, was not always as at present. Forty years ago it was as handsome a building as any in Hamburg. It was the habitation out of all which I owned in which I abode by preference. It was beautifully furnished and decorated. But it has grown old and poor like all the rest. I am obliged to let it as lodgings; I charge very little—hardly anything; but even then my lodgers do not always pay me; they have the money, but they see I am poor and old, and they think they can defraud me. It is therefore, distinguished Herr Consul, that I have brought before you this unruly and obstreperous sailor. I know that you are great and just, and that you will not see an honest man ruined because he is old and feeble."

'"Assuredly not, Herr Zschokke, if I can help it. So you were a rich man forty years ago? Were you in any business at that time?"

'"Yes, dearest sir, I was in the business of a commission merchant. I was entrusted with the management of many valuable transactions. My friends were among the wealthiest and the most considerable of this country and of England. I had many English acquaintances, worthy sir—or Americans, it is the same."

'"Not altogether, perhaps! But how happened it that you afterwards fell into such misfortunes, my good sir?"

'"Ah, I was unfortunate, and that is all!" he said, with a pathetic shrug. "The Providence was against me—my friends—everything! But we need not speak of it—it is irreparable. This is the room which the honourable Herr Consul came to see."

'We had been ascending the stairs during this chat, and were now arrived at the second floor. But my conductor, instead of leading me to the left of the landing, as I had anticipated from my inspection of the outside of the premises that he would do, took me to the right, and showed me into a tolerably decent apartment, which had nothing sinister in its appearance; and although it opened into another beyond, the door of this stood open, and was entirely devoid of either locks or bolts.

'"Is this the room which the sailor occupied?"

'"But indubitably, noble sir!" answered the landlord, readily.

'"Where then is the locked door he spoke of?"

'"Have I not said at the time that it was lies from beginning to the end?"

'"You have no closed room in the house?"

'"No! twenty times no!"

'"Nor any room of which the shutters are kept closed?"

'"How can the Herr think such a thing? Can he not see for himself?"

'"I will see for myself, since you permit it, Herr Zschokke," said I; "I will see on the other side of the landing!"

'"Not there, beloved sir!" exclaimed the little landlord, hastily endeavouring to prevent me from going whither I had intended. "Not there! No one goes there! I do not know myself what there may be on that side!"

'"Then it is quite time you were enlightened, Herr Zschokke," I answered, quietly freeing myself from the grasp he had laid upon my sleeve. "To have lived in a place for forty years, and not to know what there is in it, would be a pity."

'"There is nothing—nothing! But in short, I could not endure to have the Herr Consul visit an apartment which is perhaps not in a state fit to receive a visitor so highly honoured. Rather than that, I would be willing to consider the small sum which this sailor owes me as paid, and to give him a receipt in full."

'"In that case, Herr Zschokke, of course it will not be necessary for me to prosecute my inquiry. How much is owing to you?"

'"No less a sum than ten silver groschen!" replied he, with a sigh.

'As the amount named is equal to about a shilling of English money, I thought this was a case in which justice might be tempered with

generosity. Accordingly I counted out five silver groschen into Herr Zschokke's dingy palm, as from my own private exchequer, and let him know that, on writing me a receipt for this, I would consent to look upon the matter as settled.

'While he was taking his note-book from his pocket and scribbling the receipt with a blunt-pointed pencil, I looked about with some curiosity. We were at this time once more on the landing, and the door of the room on the left-hand side was slightly ajar. All that was visible through this crevice, however, was a strip of wall with some tattered wall-paper hanging to it, and a corresponding strip of very dirty floor. But just as the landlord had finished signing his receipt, and was handing it to me, a peculiar sound made itself audible, coming through the narrow crevice; a sound of knocking—first, three deliberate blows, and then, after a pause, three more, given rapidly and impatiently.

'Herr Zschokke started at the sound, and shot a guilty glance at me from beneath his bushy eyebrows; then, muttering something whose import I did not catch, he shuffled to the door and closed it. I stood facing him, undecided for a moment whether or not to force him to admit me into this jealously-guarded apartment, that I might probe the apparent mystery to the bottom. But I reflected that I was a Consul, and not a police-officer; and that I really had no more business

to pry into Herr Zschokke's secrets than had the President of the United States. The business that had brought us together was transacted, and there remained nothing more for me to do but to wish him good evening and to take my departure. The incident, however, did not fade from my memory; it was not devoid of points mysteriously suggestive to an active imagination. Who was this dingy old man with his furtive eyes? What deed had been done forty years ago in that dismantled old house—a deed the consequences of which had gradually reduced him from affluence to poverty? What was kept hidden behind the barred door—what thing that knocked against the walls of its prison so resolutely and so eagerly? I pondered over these questions a good deal, of course without coming to any conclusion about them. Once or twice I actually revisited the neighbourhood where the house stood, with the partially-formed purpose of renewing my acquaintance with the proprietor and trying to induce him to lay aside his piquant reserve, and to tell me a tale beside which one of Mrs. Radcliffe's romances should seem tame. But I never got further than the outside of the building, when I stared up at the closed shutters, and passed on. It was partly inertia that restrained me from carrying out my design, partly indisposition to meddle with other people's affairs, and partly (and most of all) a fear that the solution of the mystery, when it was obtained, would turn out

to be very much below the level of what my fancy had conceived. The facts, when known, could be of no value to me; but my imagination of what they might be had a sort of value.

'A year more passed away, and found me still sitting in state in my little office in Hamburg, in doubt whether I should ask for three months' leave of absence, or whether I should send in my definitive resignation. In fact, I was weary of that particular branch of diplomacy which I had thus far cultivated, and desired to relieve my shoulders from the irksome load of a national responsibility. Day by day I was verging nearer and nearer to a decision in favour of resigning, and at last had got so far as to begin a letter on the subject to the Secretary at Washington, when my head clerk came into my room and informed me that a woman wanted to see me.

'"A woman? What sort of a woman?"

'"Well, sir, she may have been a lady."

'"Tell her I'm busy! Or—stop; she'll be sure to come again some time when I really am busy; tell her to come in!"

'The woman, or the lady, came in accordingly, and bowed slightly to me, and stood still. She was clad in a mean dress, which had the appearance of having been cut for a person larger than she was; and a threadbare mantilla or shawl was drawn round her thin shoulders.

'"Now, madam," I said, "please let me know what I can do for you. There is a chair

—you may sit down if you like. I am rather busy, but . . . . I am at your service for a few minutes."

'"I think I had better come some other time; I do not wish to inconvenience you, but I thought ——"

'"Speak a little louder, please. The noise in the street outside prevents me from hearing what you say."

'The woman made no reply. She put one hand on the arm of the chair I had offered her, and seemed to lean on it for support. She looked at me fixedly, and presently lifted the slight veil which she wore over the upper part of her face.

'When I saw her eyes I knew who she was, but I don't think I could have recognised her by anything else. I took a long breath, and sat without moving, or being able to move. I had thought of her so often and so intensely, that now, when she stood before me, I seemed not to realise that she was more than a very vivid apparition. I had got so into the habit of imagining what I would do if we ever met again, that now we were really met I did nothing. And when, at last, I did move and did awake, I said and did I know not what, nor shall I ever know it. It was like the beating of the heart and the kindling of the brain, which are wrought so far inward that we are not conscious of them.

'Poor girl! poor girl! her pale face had colour in it now, and something like a smile

flitted over it for a moment, when I was enough my own man again to notice how she looked.

'"I searched for you, Constance," I said; "and after all it is you who found me, not I you!"

'"I was ashamed to come to you," she answered, in a sighing voice, "but I had to come. I don't mean that I don't want to see you—I have often wanted to see you; but it seemed no use; it seemed as if there would be more pain than joy. I should have been prevented."

'"Are you alone?"

'She dropped her eyes, and after a pause said, "No."

'"Who is it?"

'"My husband."

'"Is your husband . . . Who is he?"

'"Arthur Fellowes."

'"Constance," said I, "I won't ask you any questions; I might hurt you without meaning to; if there's anything you can tell me, tell me in whatever way you like."

'Some features of her story were very strange; so strange and miserable that if I had not heard them from her lips I should have said they were impossible. Fellowes had established a power over her which has no name, and the nature of which neither she nor he, nor anybody else that I know of, has ever fully comprehended. It can be described only by its effects. By making passes over her with his hands, and afterwards simply by an exercise of

his will, he was able to put her into a state of trance. When in this state, a part of her being —the inner soul, perhaps, from which the personal thoughts and volitions of the individual originate—was removed or held in abeyance; but the outer part, which acts immediately upon the bodily senses and faculties, not only remained, but was endowed with capacities far transcending those of its normal condition. In this state, the personality of her master seemed to be substituted for her own, so that she did his will and thought his thoughts as if they were hers; and was conscious of everything that passed through his mind, apart from any spoken communication between them. In this state, moreover, she was able to see and describe whatever persons or objects he was thinking about; seeing them in actual manifestation, no matter what distance intervened between her bodily eyes and them. In this way, she told me, she had more than once seen me; and in proof of it she related to me several things that I had said and done at a time when I had been separated from her by many hundred miles. Another particular about her trance life was this, that in it Fellowes was able to act upon her from a distance; so that, informed by his will, and without any connivance or even consciousness of her own, she would go on his errands and transact his business with as much accuracy and consistency as if she were acting from herself. Her appearance and manner under such circumstances were, indeed,

somewhat constrained and mechanical, but not enough so to excite suspicion or remark on the part of those with whom she was brought in contact. On emerging from these trance states she ordinarily retained but an imperfect and confused recollection of what she had done or suffered while in them; it seemed to her shadowy and incoherent, like the memory of an ordinary dream; and sometimes it was all a blank, and she could infer what had happened only from chance hints let fall by Fellowes, or from scraps of evidence obtained in some such accidental way.

'Her feeling towards Fellowes while under his influence was one neither of affection nor aversion; but wholly of indifference. Being practically identified with him for the time being, she could not love or hate him any more than she could love or hate herself. But when she resumed her natural state, and was once more mistress of her emotions, she had regarded him with an enmity which all her fear of his invincible and absolute power scarcely availed to keep from breaking forth in overt acts, as well as in thoughts and words. In process of time, however, the chain which she wore became so heavy and so hopeless, that she sank into an apathetic mood, and ceased to think of struggling against her fate. She bore herself towards her tyrant with the dull submission of a prisoner who knows of no escape. Conscious that at any moment he might require of her what she could not refuse, she forbore in self-

defence to look forward to freedom; and, at last, came to desire rather than to dread the trance which rendered her in actuality the automaton that she practically remained at all times.

'All this while Fellowes was persistently striving to solve the problem of the whereabouts of Edward Cambryn's dead body, and of the will which he had left. During those three days that had followed his first interview with me, he had discovered the existence in Constance of this supernatural faculty of hers; and it had suggested to him the idea of using her as a means of finding out the truth. The advantage it gave him was indeed enormous, and only just inferior to his most sanguine expectations. One of the first matters as to which he informed himself was the existence of Constance's little fortune at the Beacon Hill Bank; and this so nearly counterbalanced my offer to him that he had no hesitation in regarding it as an equivalent. After having put Mrs. Cambryn off her guard by a few obvious devices, he, on the evening of the third day, threw Constance into the trance state, placed her in the waggon that he had in waiting, and drove her to his lodgings in the village. Here they were married by special license, the notary who performed the ceremony being in Fellowes's pay, and afterwards accompanying them in their flight. Late at night the party started for Worcester; but when scarcely a mile from Northmere, Constance, by some mishap, suddenly recovered her right mind,

and gave utterance to that scream which had reached my ears while I leaned out of my window. Fellowes lost no time in restoring her to her charmed sleep, and they went on their way without further interruption. They reached Worcester an hour before the train started; but instead of stopping there, they, as a measure of additional precaution, drove on to the next station, and took the train from there; leaving the waggon in the possession of their companion, whose route lay henceforth in another direction than theirs. Arrived at Boston, Fellowes took his wife to an hotel, and shortly before ten o'clock, when the banks opened, he brought her to the neighbourhood of the Beacon Hill Bank, and put to the test for the first time the great experiment of making her obey his will at a distance from his physical presence. He sent her into the bank with directions to draw out her deposit in the regular way, and to return with it to him, while he awaited her in the doorway of a shop hard by. All went well, and by the time I had arrived at the bank, and was questioning Mr. Dyke, he and Constance were in the train going to New York. They got to New York the same afternoon, and the next morning they took passage in a merchant vessel bound to Havre.

'From this time forth their history, though strange enough, had a monotony that makes it unnecessary to recount it in detail. For nearly six months Constance was almost continually

entranced, and, in that state, following out the various clues which her husband obtained as to the object of their search. Occasionally they seemed very near the grand discovery, but they never quite attained it. Several traces of the missing Edward Cambryn they indeed came upon; they found the time of his last journey from Liverpool forty years ago, and followed him step by step to London; but here the traces vanished. From certain indications it was inferred that his expedition had been, not a pleasure tour, but connected with some business object. Be that as it may, they failed to keep pace with him to the end. Where his bones lay, and where were the papers on which depended the inheritance, they knew no more than I. Constance's trance vision enabled her to see only what existed or was passing at the time; she could neither look forward into the future, nor reanimate the occurrences of the dead past. By her aid Fellowes could invisibly enter the privacy of any household, or dog the footsteps and listen to the words of any person, near or far; but he could do no more. Constance was obedient, but she could suggest nothing, could never act, save on his initiative; and so, after all, her power was more a marvel than an efficient instrument.'

CHAPTER VII.

'CONSTANCE went on to tell me that, after repeated failures to attain his end, a change came over Fellowes. While he had been wholly absorbed in the pursuit, he had had little communication with her other than such as related to the business in hand. But now that he was disappointed and thrown back upon himself, the uglier side of his disposition began to manifest itself. He seemed to hold Constance responsible for the miscarriage of his plans, and visited his resentment chiefly upon her. Their money was nearly all gone, and the prospect before them was certainly not encouraging from any point of view. To make matters worse, Fellowes betrayed a strong tendency to seek relief from his troubles in brandy. He was intoxicated every evening, and when in that condition his behaviour was such as it would not be pleasant to dwell upon. He threatened to make use of her power of second-sight as a means of perpetrating some robbery. This purpose, however, on the one occasion when he attempted to carry it into execution, was frustrated in a strange manner. Constance, who had been previously aware of what he wished to do, and had, when alone one day, passionately prayed to God that it might not be permitted, found, when he undertook to throw her into a trance as usual, that she was able so

far to resist his influence that her unconsciousness was only partial, and insufficient for the end in view. Then followed a terrible struggle and scene between them. Fellowes went so far as to threaten her with death, and actually had recourse to some physical violence; but Constance held out against him, feeling, probably, that there are things worse than death; moreover, her unexpected success in resisting him at all inspired her with courage to resist him still further. It was to her advantage, too, that Fellowes could not be sure (nor could she either for that matter) whether his failure to influence her as heretofore was due to some increased power of opposition in her, or to a decay in the efficiency of his own will; or, whether, again, it might be owing simply to a natural diminution of his superior weight in the scale of their mutual relations. The dread lest the fault might be in himself prevented him from proceeding to extremities with her; for he reasoned that if she were inactive in the matter, then to wreak his vengeance upon her would be to lay the stick across his own shoulders; since she would be available again as soon as he had recovered his wonted potency.

'As it turned out, he never entirely regained his old ascendency; and month by month and week by week it seemed to wane. Constance noticed, furthermore, that his devotion to brandy bore a direct relation to his inability to subdue her; and it shows a truly divine element in her character that she endeavoured, nevertheless, to

restrain him from the indulgence. But her efforts were vain, and he gradually went from bad to worse, until at length the only result that could be looked for, occurred: he had a severe attack of *delirium tremens*. It was a hideous experience for Constance—but from the date of that attack her double life ceased: Fellowes was able to put her into the trance no more.

'And when she saw him shorn of the strength which had made her hate him, her heart began to turn to him with a woman's perverse compassion. She tended him as carefully as if he had been worthy of her care, and exerted herself in all such ways as were open to her to support him. Work was hard to get, however, and they were reduced to pitiful straits. He frequently urged her to write to me and solicit my help; but this she steadily refused to do. At last Fellowes, in an interval of partial recovery from his prostration, succeeded in committing some act which rendered their longer stay in England unsafe: they had not the means to return to America; and thus it happened that they came to Hamburg.

'While staying in this city, Constance learnt that I was the American Consul there; but she was careful to keep this knowledge from her husband, being herself as yet unwilling to appeal to me. A few days before the present time, however, Fellowes had discovered the fact, and had at once assured her that, unless she betook herself to the Consulate forthwith, he would go there

himself, and, as he expressed it, "soon bring the fool to terms."

'For a time she had succeeded in putting him off with promises; but yesterday matters had come to a crisis, and she had felt that she would be obliged to yield, when an event happened which rendered yielding no longer difficult.

'"What is that?" I asked her.

'"It is a sad thing to be glad about," she answered; "but I have learnt how to be glad for things that would make others sorry. My mother is dead!"

'"I have known that for some time."

'"We heard of it only last evening. In an old English newspaper that had been wrapped round something we brought from England, I found an advertisement stating that she was dead, and requesting me to communicate with the executors. I know mamma meant to leave me something, and I suppose from this that she has done so."

'"I am able to tell you that she has left you all her possessions," I said. "I wrote to the executors myself when I saw her death announced. Mr. Dyke has the money in keeping for you. It will take five or six weeks to send to him and get his answer; and meanwhile you will be cared for, Constance. Oh, Constance, all this has been very strange! I am sorry you could not come to me before."

'"I could not know how you have been thinking of me," said she, looking down at her

folded hands: "and you had a right to be angry. You must have thought me very wrong when—at the time Arthur came to Northmere; but I could not help myself. My mother had a control over me something like his, though not so complete. Well, I have been punished."

"'What do you intend to do now?"

"'I shall take care of my husband. He is very ill—more so, I think, than he imagines. If he has another fit of that delirium, I fear he might not live. He is not so bad a man as you might think, from what you know of him. I know all about him from the beginning, and there is a great deal that excuses him. He was cruelly wronged before he ever thought of wronging others. I should be lonely without him, and I like to take care of him. I hope, now that we shall have a little money, that we may be more happy than we have been."

"'He keeps to the brandy still?"

"'He has to have a little; sometimes he gets too much, but only when I am not by to prevent him. He obeys *me*, now!" she said, with a sad smile. "But when he has had too much, he is sometimes very violent—poor Arthur! He is sorry afterwards, and promises . . . . but he cannot keep his promises."

"'You must let me come over and call upon you. By the way, where are you staying?"

"'At a very poor place, indeed; it is a pity you should come to us there; it is not such a place as you could ever have seen. I think it

would be better to wait until we can get to some better place."

'But I would not allow this; and at last she said, "Well, then, it is an old tumble-down house in the Kugelstrasse; it has been used as a kind of lodging-house, but no one except ourselves is there now, because it is believed to be haunted. I do not mind it at all, but it makes poor Arthur very nervous. The landlord is a very strange old man, and Arthur thinks he has murdered some one in that house. But I do not believe that; though the old man really seems to have something on his mind—especially the last two days, when he has been ill in bed. He called me in there, to-day, and told me, if he died, to take out a packet that was under his pillow, and open it."

'"What is this old fellow's name?"

'"Herr Zschokke."

'"He is an old friend of mine. I have visited the house and seen the ghost—or heard of it, rather. It knocks somewhere, doesn't it?"

'"Yes," said she, smiling; "it knocks on the other side of a locked door in the room in which we are. It is very mysterious, and I don't wonder at its troubling Arthur; but still it doesn't trouble me—I could almost say I like it; when I hear it I feel somehow helped and protected—as if the ghost were a friend. I would like to have the door opened; but Herr Zschokke says it must not be while he is alive; and Arthur would like to have it

fastened more firmly than it is now. Well—then I will tell him that you are coming. You'll be kind to him, won't you? And don't notice if he seems to speak harshly to me. It's only a way he has got into; he never does any harm, when he is himself."

'I spent the interval between Constance's departure and my visit to her in endeavouring to realise the changes that had occurred since our last meeting. The changes in her were evident and deplorable enough. The fresh, impressible girl was for ever gone; and the woman who came in her place showed the traces of the miserable wrongs and outrages that she had endured. Nevertheless, so strongly rooted had been the original sweetness of her nature, in spite of its many weaknesses, that much of its fragrance and innocent charm was still left. Her suffering had blighted but not degraded her; and although Fellowes had compelled something of the spiritual part of her to his base uses, it had been necessary for him first to lay asleep the inmost soul, wherein reside all the deeper sanctities; it was not permitted him to pollute more than the externals, which clothe the flower but are no essential part of it. For Constance was like a white rose, wilted and nipped by untimely frosts and storms, but retaining, within, its native perfume and purity. Meanwhile her character had gained strength and height; and although much of the shrinking sensitiveness and many of the delicate illusions of her life had been removed,

she was a nobler and more lovable woman than before her calamities began.

'And yet—and yet—there was a gulf between us! She was not the maiden I had known; doubtless I, too, had changed. She was chastened and strengthened, but she was not my Constance; she would not have been mine even had that besotted sinner who was her husband been removed from my path. There were things in her experience which I did not know of, and could never know. The grim reality of life and struggle in the world had altered her manner, the cadence of her voice, the wistfulness of her mouth; or, in short, it had made a difference in her, and the fact that she remained in some way the same rendered these differences only the more noticeable and—different! Constance Fellowes was the only woman in the world for whom I cared anything; but that was because Constance Cambryn had ceased to live. I would have given my life, perhaps, for the former; but only in the latter could I have fully found it. There was a sense of loss in my heart as I sat and thought about her that was all the more bitter because it was not bitter enough. It is only by paradoxes that I can attempt to express my meaning. If there has never been any passage in your life that enables you to understand me, you are a fortunate man.

'Well, I was glad to emerge from these sombre musings, and to bend my steps to-

wards the old house in the Kugelstrasse. It was quite late; though the summer days were long, the shops that I passed were alight. There was a dim light, too, in a second-floor window of Herr Zschokke's residence; and a flickering gas-jet burnt in the hall as I stumbled my way in. There was no one to receive me and conduct me upstairs, so I proceeded to perform that office for myself. But when I had arrived at the first landing I heard a voice calling in a weak, complaining tone. Looking around I saw a door partly open, and it was from this direction the voice seemed to come. I pushed the door open, and found myself in a small bedchamber, illuminated only by the light of the street lamp in front of the house, which shone through the window, and cast a dim radiance upon the bed in the corner. This bed, as I presently perceived, contained Herr Zschokke. He was a grisly-looking object, and evidently in a precarious state both of mind and body.

"'You are the honoured Herr Consul, are you not?' he asked, feebly raising himself on one elbow, and peering at me with his deep-set eyes.

"'I am he. I am sorry to see you unwell. Have you no one to take care of you?'

"'The lady who lodges upstairs gives me all the care I need. She is a good lady; she is not as the others; she has paid her rent. Her husband is commonly besotted, and he finds fault with the accommodation; but the lady is amiable. She told me that you were expected

here to-night. Distinguished sir, I make bold to speak—I desired to say something to your Excellency."

'"Say on," Herr Zschokke. But I am expected upstairs, and it is late ——".

'"Ah! I will not detain you. But why should that drunken fellow object to the accommodation? It is very good for the price. What is a little noise, more or less, which might be caused by the banging of a shutter in the wind, or—a hundred ordinary things might cause it! The lady does not mind it. Besides, the door is locked; it has even two locks, and if you unlock one, you fasten the other. Besides, there are bars; I put them up, to guard against accidents. For the knocking is certainly pretty loud, sometimes; and I have seen the door tremble! But it has been locked a long time now—forty years! It is not likely that, after holding so long, it should break down at last. But it certainly sounds very loud, sometimes, especially when you are alone. It was therefore that I first had the idea to take in lodgers. These things do not make one so nervous when there are other people in the house. But it is absurd for the lodgers to make objections to it; what have they to do with it? They were not present when it was locked up; they know not what is inside there. When I locked that door, I was alone—I took care about that! I bought the locks, and fastened them on myself, and afterwards, when that did not seem enough, I put up the bars

also. There is nothing that can hurt them. They do not know what causes the noise. Neither do I know; it was silent enough in the room when I closed the door forty years ago! The knocking began later—a week later. I do not know what causes it. I thought it might be the blinds, which were, perhaps, loose; so I secured them also. I put bars across them on the outside, as you may have observed, worthy Herr Consul. Ah, I have seen you come and stand outside, and look! But it could not have been the blinds, because the noise went on just the same. Sometimes I thought it would certainly get out—whatever it is—it was so loud—Hist!"

'He sat upright in bed, with his bushy eyebrows lifted and his finger raised. A muffled noise sounded faintly in our ears; three heavy knocks, then, after an interval, three more given hurriedly and urgently. Then silence again. Herr Zschokke sank back upon his pillow.

'"Forty years!" he muttered to himself. "One would think he would be tired after forty years. But he is stronger than ever. He will surely be out some day!"

'"Of whom do you speak, Herr Zschokke?"

'"What does the honoured Herr Consul say? I spoke of no one; I was thinking only. But that puts me in mind of a curious thing—one of those coincidences that occur, and one cannot account for them. I once knew a man—this was long ago—many years ago, he must

have been dead long since—this man had a knock just like that. He was an Englishman, and Englishmen always knock at a door; they only look for a bell afterwards. Therefore, when I hear that sound that we were listening to just now, above stairs, it reminds me of him."

"'Did this Englishman stay with you long?"

"'Forty years is a long time, is it not? Stay, what am I saying? I was thinking of something else. I am ill, and my memory is confused. How long did he stay? He came to stay only overnight—one night. We had some business to transact; it would not take long, though it involved a good deal of money. He was a very wealthy man; but that was nothing to me; I was as wealthy as he. It was in the morning that he came; he had before written me a letter; he introduced himself, and we talked. I found him a pleasant man—more amiable than most Englishmen. At one o'clock we had dinner; I gave him a bottle of my best wine—my Marcobrunner. Then the evening came; we were still talking—discussing on business. He was to spend the night with me, as I tell you; only one night. We went up to his room, to be out of the way of the servants. It is a curious thing, dear Herr Consul—another coincidence; his room was the same one which was afterwards shut up. It only happened so, you understand; anything might happen! We had

another bottle of wine up there, and a fine piece of old cheese, which I cut with my long clasp knife, because that stupid servant had forgotten to bring up a knife with the cheese. Perhaps we should not have had that other bottle of wine; it was strong wine, and I think it made the Englishman a little less amiable; he said some things that were not quite polite. And I was such a fiery young fellow in those days, I would answer him back; there might have been some difference between us—some dispute. And, as I have told you, there was a great deal of money involved; and the bank-notes were on the table. But if you think I would touch a single groschen before it was mine by law and by justice, it is because you do not know me; I would rather have left all those thousands of thalers there on the table during all these forty years—I would rather do that than touch one of them before the Englishman should say, 'Well, I agree, then, let it be so!' And I would rather be poor and lose all my money, and at last die by myself here with no one to take care of me—yes, rather than go and open that door and take the money, before he should say, 'You may have it!' Hist! hist! there he is again!"

'Yes; that mysterious knocking was repeated, and it resounded dully through the silent emptiness of the house. Heard under these circumstances, it was a ghastly sound. Each stroke made my pulse leap. All the while, Herr Zschokke's eyes were fixed upon

me,' and they glittered in the lamplight like red agates.

'This was not all. After the silence which followed the knocking had lasted a few moments, a sort of scuffling sound was audible on the floor of the room overhead, and the tones of a man's voice; and then the fall of some heavy object. Then a door opened, and a stealthy footstep descended the stair. It paused on the threshold of the room in which we were, and the door creaked upon its hinges.

'Herr Zschokke sat glaring out from the grey jungle of his hair and beard. "Lieber Gott! he comes at last!" he whispered.

'But it was a woman's figure that entered the room—Constance, her face very pale, her breathing laboured.

'"I knew you had come," she said, when she saw me. "I heard a talking down here. Arthur is very ill; will you come up and see him?"

'"Is the door firm still?" demanded Herr Zschokke.

'She looked at him and nodded.

'"It will not last after to-night," he said. "This very night it is forty years. To-night it will be known. Frau Fellowes, you have remembered what I told you—about that little packet? See, it is here!"

'He turned and lifted up the corner of his pillow, discovering a small brown paper parcel, about eight inches in length, tied and sealed.

'"I shall not forget, Herr Zschokke," she said.

'He sank back, muttering, "And yet it is only by me that it should be done. He will expect it of me. He has waited a long time!"

'I followed Constance upstairs and into her apartment. It was a room larger than the one below, but with an appearance of even greater squalor. It had once been carpeted, but the carpet was now utterly worn away, save for some ragged strips that still remained near the walls. Stained fragments of paper clung to the plaster here and there, or hung downwards in unsightly tatters. The furniture consisted of a bed, a table, and a chair. This last was drawn into a corner of the room, as far as possible from a door which faced the one by which we had entered, and which was fitted with two huge rusty locks, and additionally secured by three bars laid transversely across it. This door seemed somehow to dominate the whole room; it was not only the most conspicuous object there, but it seemed to possess a personality of its own. This effect was enhanced by the contrast of the red rust of the locks with the blackness of the door and the bars.

'There was a candle, and a bottle, and the remains of some supper upon the table, which stood within reach of the chair. In the chair was seated, in a slouching attitude, a figure that I of course knew must be Fellowes.

'His wife went up to him, and said,

"Arthur, this is Mr. Blount, who has come to see us, and who has been so kind."

'"Help me up!" said he; and with her assistance he rose slowly to an upright position. "Well, Mr. Blount," he continued, looking at me, and speaking with a pitiable imitation of his old jocular air, "here we are again!"

'"I hope to see you in a better state before long," I said, with as much heartiness as I could throw into my voice.

'"It is devilish poor accommodation to offer you—especially seeing that you represent the United States of America—for which, by-the-by, accept my respectful congratulations. I don't even know that I can offer a chair, unless you will consent to look upon that bed as such; our landlord is not very liberal in the matter of furniture. However, if you don't mind, you—take care! Gracious heaven, look at that!"

'He was pointing at the bed with a shaking hand and an expression of sickening disgust and terror. I looked in the direction indicated by his finger, but could see nothing except a rather unpresentable blanket. Not knowing what to make of his evident agitation, I glanced at Constance for explanation. Her face and the mute movement of her lips revealed to me at once the hateful truth. After a few moments Fellowes dropped into his chair with a low laugh.

'"It's the light, I suppose," he said, "though

I don't see why a bad light should make the room seem so full of these nasty vermin. You must have seen that great creature squatting on the bed there—just where you were going to sit down. Where can he have gone to? And I shouldn't mind their being on the bed, if they'd only leave me alone. And there's Connie ready to swear there's no such thing! Confound her, she's always for making out that things are better than they are. Tell the truth and shame the devil—that's my plan; and if you see a snake or a rat, crush it! But the trouble about these things is, they're so infernally cunning that you can't—pshaw! What were we talking about? Yes, things have gone back a bit since I met you last. I was a great fool, Mr. Blount, and I've often regretted it since. I thought I was doing a deuced clever thing, but that was my mistake. With those two thousand pounds of yours, and no encumbrance, I might have got on. But Connie, here, has been the death of me; I ought to have left her behind for you. She ruined me—and served me right, may be; but, there it is. I wish to the devil I'd left her behind for you to pick up. I know you fancied her."

'While her husband was speaking, Constance had gradually and, as it were, insensibly approached the black door, and was now leaning against it, with her hands hanging folded before her. She interposed at this point, and said hurriedly and nervously:—

'"Tell Mr. Blount about our idea of going back to America, Arthur. Ask him whether he thinks it would be best?"

'"Oh, yes, you are very hot to get back to America, I dare say! Divorce is easy there, I've been told—ha, ha! And just look at her, Mr. Blount. She goes over and sticks by that infernal door just to spite me. She knows I daren't go after her there, and so she thinks she's safe. But I can throw something at her—and I will, and hit her, too—I'm not afraid to do that. Here's this bottle, for instance; it's empty now (worse luck!), but I can hit her with this. Now then, confound you!" he continued, laying hold of the neck, and addressing his wife in a threatening tone; "will you come away from that door, or will you have your head ——?"

'He stopped, and the bottle fell from his hand. I had been on the point of stepping forward to wrest it from him, but my interference was unnecessary. From the other side of the black door came the sound of three measured blows, smitten heavily against the massive panels. A pause, during which one might draw a breath, followed; then the next three strokes came succeeding one another with imperious quickness, and given with such vigour that the staunch framework quivered. Then a total silence, while the blood hummed in my ears.

'"Isn't it too bad!" faltered Fellowes, after a while, appealing to me. "I was only in fun—anybody could see that?—and that great

hulking fiend must come and hammer at me like that. It's always so. I've got a habit of swearing—a bad habit of course, but it is too late to cure it, and I don't mean anything by it. Well, as soon as I let out a few more oaths than usual at her, up jumps that devil there and bangs against those panels as if he'd drive a hole through them. And I believe he will do it, yet; and that's exactly what she wants. Look at her! It frightens me almost out of my life, that noise does, and you too, I daresay; but she enjoys it as much as if each knock were a five-pound note! There never was anything like it. This place has been a perfect hell to me ever since we got into it; but I believe upon my soul that she would rather live here than in a mansion in Mayfair. Look at her!"

'There was certainly an expression about Constance's eyes and brow that could not but be deemed singular under the circumstances—a light of security and peace, as of one who was removed from all liability to danger or disturbance. The thing that shook the souls of everyone else brought strength and courage to hers. Whatever or whomsoever that closed room held imprisoned was her champion, and powerful to take her part against the world. Let her but rest upon the black door, and neither Fellowes nor any other enemy should prevail against her.

'"I won't stand it, you know," continued Fellowes. "I'll leave this to-morrow. I'll

leave to-night, if that infernal racket begins again! And she shall come along with me."

'"Not to-night, Arthur," replied Constance. "I will go wherever you like to-morrow, but to-night I must stay here."

'"I was going to ask you whether I might not take you home with me to-night," I said. "I have a room prepared for you. After that you can go to the hotel, until your remittance comes from Boston. This really does not seem to be the right sort of place to get any rest in."

'"Our rest must be afterwards. We must stay now—it cannot be helped—for, look!" said she, directing me with her eyes to Fellowes. So I looked, and saw him bend forward in his chair, and raise one foot, as a man might do who was aiming to crush a reptile with his heel. Then down the heel came, and Fellowes ground it savagely into the floor, while his teeth grated together. A moment after, with a shudder of loathing, he was shaking an invisible something off his sleeve. Then he sank back in his chair with a groan, and pressed his hands over his face.

'"It would not be safe to move him," said Constance. "You are very kind, but until this attack is over, he must be kept here. Oh, I know how to take care of him, and I am not afraid. You remember I told you not to come here; it is not a fit place for visitors. Go now, and to-morrow we will see about a change."

'"To be frank with you, I don't like to

leave you alone with your husband," I said. "This is a madness like any other, and he might kill you in a paroxysm at any moment. You would be quite helpless, for Herr Zschokke is apparently dying. If you send me away there would be no protection ——"

'I was standing close beside her as I spoke, and was inadvertently resting one hand against the door. Suddenly I felt a shock pass up my arm, with a sensation of intense cold. Constance started as well as I, but the warm blood flushed in her cheeks, and her eyes brightened. And now once more resounded that heavy knock, and as the strokes fell, I saw the black plank vibrate, and fancied I could feel the influence of a living personality on the other side, but a few inches distant from me, and so resolute to come forth, that I was strongly impelled to burst open the door, and end his imprisonment and the mystery at once.

'"Let us have the door down!" I said to Constance. "This is too horrible. It has been going on for forty years, and I suspect there is foul play at the bottom of it. Where are the keys? or a jemmy would do the business."

'"Yes—No! stop—it might hurt Arthur," she said, detaining me as I was about to go in search of some burglarious implement.

'"What might hurt him?"

'"What is here," she answered, laying her fingers on the panel. "It is a friend to me, but I think it is an enemy to him."

'"This is for me to do," said a voice that

made us both turn sharply. "I have been a long time coming, but I will see my old friend now, and settle our business. Stand aside, if you please; no one can open that door but me."

'It was Herr Zschokke, in his dressing-gown and slippers: a more appalling spectacle than most apparitions. He tottered as he walked, and had, indeed, the appearance of a man near to death; but an unnatural energy inspired him. He advanced to the door, and there paused, breathing heavily. He seemed to have no eyes for anything but the door from this time forth, and no consciousness of anything save that which waited on the other side of it. After he had somewhat recovered his breath, he slowly drew from the pocket of his dressing-gown the little sealed bundle which he had showed us underneath his pillow. He tore off the fastenings, and, having unwrapped the paper, produced two keys.

'At this juncture, Fellowes, who had temporarily relapsed into a sort of shuddering stupor, sprang to his feet and shrieked out, "Don't let him do it! Stop him! Kick him out! If he lets that creature out I shall be murdered!"

'Herr Zschokke took no more notice of this outburst than if he had not heard it. Perhaps he did not hear it. For my part, I felt no inclination to interfere; and Constance could not have done so effectually had she desired it. Fellowes, moaning and muttering,

resumed his seat, and spoke no further articulate words.

'Herr Zschokke, taking the keys in his right hand, stepped close up to the door, and laid his ear against it, as if listening. Then, with the key, he rapped lightly on the panel, and said in a husky tone, "Are you there, Herr Edward? It is late; but even now it was not easy to come. I shall let you out, and then—well, then we shall see more of each other; we shall finish our little business. Tell me, are you there? are you ready?"

'A single ponderous blow was the answer. It resounded through the house, and the echo of it went rumbling down the stairs, as if to herald the way for what was to come after.

'"Well—good!" muttered Herr Zschokke, inserting one of the keys into a keyhole, which he accomplished more easily than I should have imagined. With the other key in hand he paused, and spoke again.

'"Shall you forgive me, Herr Edward? You know it was without thought—in a moment! And I left the bargain as it was!"

'A dead silence. I checked my breath to listen; but no sound came. An ominous silence, truly! My eyes were on Herr Zschokke's face, and I saw the haggard lines deepen and the jaw relax. It was fully two minutes before he again essayed to speak, and then his utterance was so imperfect that I could scarcely distinguish anything he said. But I fancied I caught the words, "You have had your revenge

already, forty times over; but you were always hard at a bargain. So be it!"

'He put the other key in the lock; then, by a violent effort, which evidently taxed to the utmost his failing strength, he turned both keys simultaneously in opposite directions. I heard the bolts grate back in the socket. Herr Zschokke next pressed a sort of latch, which released the three bars; finally he laid his hand upon the door-handle, and turned it.

'The door, instead of opening in the usual way, started forward towards us, the hinges being torn from their fastenings in the solid wood, as if under the impact of some violent force. It fell at our feet with a dull crush, and the candle was extinguished.

'Something seemed to pass close by me; it affected me like an icy blast of air, and yet I knew it was not air; it possessed intelligence, and fatal purpose. It swept by me into the room, with a long, hungry sigh; I fancied it directed itself towards that corner in which Fellowes was cowering. Immediately afterwards I heard an odd sound, as of strangling or choking. Then all was still. We could see nothing. But presently there was a howling as of wind in the passage way without; it went down the stairs; the door on the street closed with a hollow noise; and again there was silence.

'What had happened? Reaching out blindly in the darkness, my hand came in contact with a soft wrist, which I knew to be

Constance's. It drew me forward towards the right, and I perceived that I was breathing a strange atmosphere, dry and lifeless. After a few steps into the black void, Constance stopped, and I with her.

'Now, close in front of our eyes, a blue flame flashed out, and revealed Herr Zschokke. He had struck a match, and was applying it to a candle in a handsome silver candlestick. The candlestick stood upon a table, which was covered with dusty bank-notes of various denominations, interspersed with little piles of gold and silver. There were two chairs at this table; one was overturned, as if the occupant had risen suddenly and violently. The other chair still contained a seated figure.

'It was the figure of an elderly man, dressed in a dark blue topcoat, with a number of short capes on his shoulders. The face, so far as it could be discerned, was of a dark yellowish hue; the brow was fixed in a stern frown; but where the eyes should have been there were only dusky cavities, with no light in them. The figure sat with his right hand outstretched upon the table, clutching at a folded document that lay there amidst the bank-notes and coin. The other hand was clenched, and pressed against his chest. A thick greyish dust—the dust of forty years—lay on his grey hair, and on his outstretched arm, and in the cavernous hollow of the eye-sockets.

'Herr Zschokke picked up the fallen chair, and drawing it to the table, sat down. He had

the air of a man come to transact business, and unconscious of spectators.

'"Here I am, Herr Edward," he said. "I have been delayed on the way, but I am come at last. Now, if you please, we will settle our affair, and then drink one more glass of wine before we part!"

'Meanwhile Constance, whose wrist I still held, was standing at the other side of the table. She was close to the man of dust, and looked earnestly down at him.

'"Cousin Edward," she said, at length, "is this you? Have you guarded my rights through all these years? It was not worth while. I should have been happier if you had let it go; but I thank you, Cousin Edward."

'She put her hand gently on his shoulder. Light though the touch was, it disturbed the balance of the figure; the joints of the skeleton fell apart, and the whole apparition sank into itself. Only a dusty heap of clothes seemed now to occupy the place where it had been.

'"So," exclaimed Herr Zschokke, with a short dry laugh that sounded like a rattle in his throat, "so you are gone! and, after all, I think you have had the best of the bargain. Ah, well, so be it! we will bear each other no grudge. But I feel myself very weary; I must have rest. I will sleep here awhile."

'He leaned his arms upon the table, rested his head upon them, and spoke no more. In some way, the dust that overspread everything had settled likewise upon him, so that it seemed

as if he, too, had spent the better part of half a century behind the door with two locks. When I shook his arm to rouse him he did not respond. He had followed Herr Edward; whither, I do not undertake to say. I drew Constance out of the room.

'"It is all over," I said; "we must go and give notice to the authorities. Where is your husband? 'It won't do to leave him here. Fellowes!"

'"Hush!" said Constance, suddenly gripping my arm. "Look!"

'It was perhaps the ghastliest spectacle of all that ghastly night. Fellowes was huddled up in his chair in the farthest corner of the room. His arms were stiffly extended before him, the fingers of the hands hooked and rigid. His chin was thrown up; his eyes stared. Strange and fearful to tell, on his exposed throat there were several small dark marks like the imprint of strangling fingers. He was quite dead.'

. . . . .

At the close of this story Blount and I were standing in a part of Hamburg not far from the Hamburg Berg. In front of us was an open place, filled with broken bricks, fragments of crumbling plaster, and similar rubbish.

'This is where Zschokke's house used to stand,' remarked Blount. 'I'm glad it's gone.'

'Did he really murder Cambryn?' I inquired.

Blount shrugged his shoulders. 'You know

as much as I do,' he said. 'I would not condemn a man on the evidence of a few delirious mutterings; but appearances were against him. As for the knocking, I can vouch for that, and it will explain to you why that tattoo that you beat upon Mrs. Blodgett's door produced such an effect upon me.'

After gazing at the ruins for awhile, we turned and strolled homewards. 'I presume that document was the will,' I said, 'and that Mrs. Fellowes owned the estates.'

'It was the will, certainly; but the estates were never disturbed. She had property enough to live upon, and those who would have constrained her to bring the action were no longer alive. I took her back to the old house at Northmere. It was a mysterious matter, and an ambiguous one, to the end; I don't pretend to explain it. That door with two locks was a good deal like the doors of other mysteries; you must turn the keys both at once in opposite directions, or, better still perhaps, let them alone.'

There was another silence. But I had one thing more to say.

'You have not yet told me whether you are married.'

'Mrs. Fellowes died a year ago,' replied Blount, curtly. 'Let us talk of something else.'

THE COUNTESS FELICITA'S DISCOVERY.

CHAPTER I.

THE earliest foreshadowing of the event destined to influence, in so sinister a manner, the course of my life, occurred on a warm summer afternoon five or six years ago. The manifestation was by no means of an apparently ominous character: on the contrary, it assumed the harmless and attractive guise of a remarkably pretty child. I was sitting, as my custom was at that time of the day and year, on a certain bench in Kensington Gardens. This bench still exists, though it has long since ceased to be a resort of mine. It is just beyond the ordinary route of Rotten Row loungers, and is so placed as not to command a view of the famous gilt monument of Albert the Unfortunate. Overhead, the thick-leaved boughs of a grotesque old thorn-tree held themselves in readiness to shield the occupant from the possible contingency of a ray of sunlight. The

circumjacent grass is the playground of children, and the theatre of the love-dramas of nurses and the military. A round pond is not far off, on which toy yachts cruise to and fro. The turf underfoot, the trees round about, and the sky overhead, combine to persuade the voluntarily credulous Londoner that this spot is country. As a matter of fact, of course, it is not rural at all, nor even suburban; in my sincere moods, it seems to me more inevitably urban than Lombard Street itself. Like the mantling of rouge on the cheek of artificial beauty, it may humbug us if we choose; but if we venture to take liberties with it, its manufactured quality becomes apparent. The sardonic brick and pavements of human civilisation circumvent it.

However, the man of the world must take things as he finds them; and I used to enjoy myself here very well during June and July. The children, I suppose, believed in it, and perhaps the nurses did too, and imagined themselves to be enamoured shepherdesses; and their innocent proceedings afforded me a good deal of entertainment. With my cigarette between my fingers, and my open but unread book upon my knee, I have observed them for hours at a time. They never scrutinised me in return, or seemed actively aware of my existence; but my personality is not naturally an obtrusive one, and I was accustomed to see the world go by and regard me not. I had settled down into the *rôle* of a looker-on at life;

my vanity would fain have cajoled me into the belief that it was my own choice to be so; but truth would reply that I had not been consulted in the matter, if I had not even striven to have it otherwise. Ah me! we that are called drones in the human hive have a pathetic time of it. We wish to be of some benefit to our race; our ideals are respectable—sometimes, perhaps, too much so; our capacities and faculties appear to ourselves fully as broad and as keen as those of other men; and yet we accomplish nothing: no mark of ours is left upon contemporary history. At best, after our positive energy has succumbed, we fill a negative niche; we become critical or appreciative; having no proper life of our own, we supplement the lives of others. A race of Hamlets; but, unlike him, destitute even of the opportunity of tragic failure.

So much I confess myself now: there was a time when my unchastised ambition rated me differently. At twenty-one I was, in the opinion of others besides myself, a promising young fellow. I was the son of a country gentleman, had been through the usual school and university curriculum, and possessed unmistakable talent. My father allowed me five hundred pounds a year—a sum which his death, two or three years later, quadrupled. What distinction might I not achieve? I took all distinction to be my province. Politics, literature, art, law, the Church—even the army came in for a share of my attention: during the next ten

years I tasted them all, though I admit I could not swallow the Church, dogmatism on any subject being repugnant to me. For the rest, things came so easily to me that nothing seemed worth while devoting myself to seriously: I required something that should tax all my energies; qualities so rare and fine should not be wasted on the every-day work of the world. I travelled over land and sea; I dallied with this and trifled with that; I stored my mind with aimless experience, until at length, at thirty-four, I awoke one morning to find myself, not famous, but good-for-nothing. Since then, I have sometimes wondered why it was so; but, that it was so, I may do myself the justice to say, I never again doubted.

It is needless to observe that I have not recounted this intensely commonplace bit of personal history from any self-complacent motive. I am not in the least proud of it. 'The trouble with you,' my friend Carlyon Drake used to say indulgently, 'is that you have always had that greatest curse of clever fellows—an independent income. Now, *I* hadn't a penny!' Well, that may have had something to do with it. If I had thought so in the beginning, I might have given my property to endow a school or an hospital, and started off on my own merits, as Carlyon did. After my failure had become a settled thing, however, I found the income not so much in the way. On my return to England I rented a small comfortable house in the west of London, joined a few respectable

clubs, rode a horse now and then, gave and went to quiet little dinners, attended first nights at theatres, visited the Continent twice a year, and was supposed to repair to the moors in the autumn. I was honoured with the kind friendship of two or three good and clever women, who kept me from lapsing into the morbid barbarism of the confirmed bachelor, though a confirmed bachelor I doubtless considered myself to be. I had passed through three love-affairs, and emerged wifeless; and being in the neighbourhood of forty years of age, there was evidently little more hope for me. And yet, as against the weapons which some women have and can use, the crust of forty masculine years is but as wax before the sun. I shall not attempt, even while I might do so, to disguise from the reader the attachment which I learned to feel for the Countess Felicita. It is true, indeed, that we were first brought intimately together by our joint interest in a terrible calamity; but homely though she was in the face, and imperfect in figure, I think I should have felt drawn to her as surely, if less rapidly, had the circumstances been commonplace. She possessed charms of mind and manner, in the presence of which greater physical defects than hers might have been forgotten, or rather become themselves the object of a kind of affection.

It is not yet time, however, to do more than allude to her; at present, I merely wish to show that my controlling desire in life was to

combine an unexceptional external conventionality with a reasonable degree of privacy and freedom of thought and action. My chief dread was of anything approaching to conspicuousness —anything tending to distinguish me from the herd of my fellows. So wide spreads the gulf between the sanguine youth who courts all eyes, and the thin-blooded man who, perchance, has come to shrink from his own gaze in the looking-glass. Had I foreseen the tragedy which was to thrust its grim presence into the even tenor of my existence, I fear that no obligations, either of duty or friendship, would have sufficed to withhold me from escaping from so untoward a notoriety to the uttermost parts of the earth. Well is it, often, for his self-respect, that man cannot penetrate the future!

On the summer afternoon to which I began with referring, after I had sat for an hour smoking on my accustomed bench, and nearly dozing from excess of physical composure, I suddenly became aware that I was being earnestly inspected by a pair of very bright young eyes. So unprecedented a phenomenon set me broad awake at once, when I found myself face to face with one of the loveliest children I ever beheld. He was about five years old, with wavy brown hair, a skin like fresh ivory, and great eyes of violet blue with dark eyebrows and lashes. His little figure was delicately and gracefully fashioned; but, though not what one would have called a robust child, he was evidently overflowing with health and spirits. He was

[redacted]nd passionate temper. I did not [redacted]berty of asking his full patronymic, [redacted]nurse addressed him as Max, and I [redacted]e did the same. At length, in pursuance [redacted]idea which had been in my mind since [redacted]day before, I asked him whether he had [redacted]er had his portrait painted. Max shook his head.

'I have a friend,' said I, 'who is very fond of making pictures of good children, and I think he would like to make one of you. He is a brave, pleasant fellow, besides being a famous painter, and his name is Carlyon Drake; he lives only a little way from here in a beautiful large studio. Will you come with me some day and make him a visit?'

'*Je veux bien!*' returned the little fellow, clapping his hands against his thighs and making a jump off the ground.

'Well, then, if you will meet me here to-morrow——'

But at this point the nurse interposed, begging my pardon, and remarking that in the first place it would be necessary to ask 'Madame.'

I replied that she was undoubtedly in the right, and that I had no intention of carrying off Monsieur Max without the knowledge and consent of his parents. I then gave her my card to deposit with Madame as a voucher for my respectability, shook hands with Max (I am not of those who have the presumption to kiss children merely because I happen to be seven

dressed in a picturesque costume [illegible] blue, and wore on the back of his hea[illegible] brimmed straw hat. He held in one [illegible] piece of string, to the other end of wh[illegible] attached an empty spool of cotton. Aft[illegible] had stared gravely at each other for a min[illegible] he came nearer, put the string in my hand, and then ran away. He was taken charge of by his nurse, a modest young woman of French aspect, in a black gown and white cap, who was walking at a little distance; but just before they passed out of sight he turned round and kissed his little fingers to me—a courtesy to which I cordially responded.

Greatly pleased with this adventure, I put the spool with its string in my pocket; and I have kept the souvenir ever since. The next day I provided myself with an apple and some other childish commodities, intending to bait my small friend with them should he appear. It was not long before I caught sight of him playing under the trees at a little distance from the place of our first meeting, the nurse sitting by with some sewing in her hand. I approached and entered into conversation with them. The child, as well as the nurse, spoke only French. I presented him with the contents of my budget, and we were soon great friends. He was a frank, affectionate, and very well-behaved boy, with a certain sprightly grace of manner that was more foreign than English; but from one or two little passages that occurred between him and his nurse, I inferred that he

or eight times their age), and left them with the understanding that I was to be on the look-out for them at three o'clock on the morrow.

I was punctual to my appointment; but neither Max nor his nurse came. After waiting a couple of hours and smoking more than my usual allowance of cigarettes, I finally gave them up, and, no better employment suggesting itself, I betook myself to Carlyon's *studio alone*. I was more disappointed than I should have supposed possible, and a chat with my old friend was as likely as anything else to restore my good humour. But I can no longer postpone giving a more particular account of Carlyon Drake and his career.

CHAPTER II.

When I remarked, a page or two back, that I had not referred to my own history from any motives of self-complacency, I might have added that the record was in so far pertinent that it afforded at once a parallel and a relief to the history of my friend Drake. The broad outward aspects of our two lives were in many respects similar, and now and then curiously alike; but then there was always that immeasurable inward difference, the effect of which was to make him what he was, and me what I was. We were both boys at the same school and youths at the same college; we were

sanguine, self-confident, and versatile; while in the matter of ideals, I think my own were if anything loftier than Carlyon's. We both went abroad at an early age, and tried our virgin weapons against the world on many battle-fields; our paths often crossed, and not unfrequently ran side by side; and we had shared more than one keen adventure together. And when at last we tired of our wanderings and vicissitudes, he, like me, came back to dim old London and made his bed and lodging there; and, like me, finally, he had never been married, and was unmarried still.

But how little real significance lies in all this, or in ten times as much of the same kind! It was not only that Carlyon had not, to use his own words, a penny of income; it was that he had, in overpowering measure, a bent and genius of his own. He was born to be a painter, and though his mind was many-sided —though he knew how to gauge many tools and use them skilfully—yet all these accomplishments but contributed to illustrate and develop his great central reason of being—the study of colour and form. His feet might seem to traverse devious paths, but his face was always set one way, and thitherward was his real journey. It used to be a humorous saying of mine that Carlyon could not shoe a horse or kiss a lady's hand without thereby making himself a better painter; yet no Irish blacksmith or Spanish cavalier could have done [redacted]thing with more neatness or the other

with more grace. In short, he was a splendid instrument of many strings, playing one tune. In person, he was one of the most beautiful male creatures I ever beheld. Somewhat under six feet in height, he was broad in the shoulders and narrow in the loins; strong to leap, run, and wrestle, and to endure fatigue. Yet his strength was concealed by grace—by an almost voluptuous ease of pose and movement, by his smile and the bend of his head, and by the fine formation and gesture of his hands. His nose was a high aquiline, with delicate tip and wide nostrils; his dark-blue eyes were long and leaf-shaped. His hair and beard, growing in short, hyacinthine curls, were originally of a golden-brown hue, but later assumed a darker colour, lightened by shades of silvery grey. His complexion was clean and fresh, his expression changeful. The character of the man was complex. Sometimes he appeared purely emotional, and was sentimental; but I apprehend that the indulgence of that side of his nature was optional with him—at least, no one could have been shrewder than he upon occasion, or, if need were, more inflexible and stern. Though uniformly in good spirits and ready to smile or laugh, he was subject to fits of depression; and I think he was notably deficient in the sense of humour and all which that implies. He could not endure ridicule or contradiction with composure; and, on the other hand, his own attempts at raillery wanted tact—a quality of which, in other relations, he had more than

enough. Perhaps he was guilty of small jealousies and grudges unworthy a man of his powers—I know not, nor do I set myself up as judge; I have loved him too long and too well. Is it a selfish or an unselfish form of affection, I wonder, that finds something lovable in a friend's faults?

At all events, Carlyon was a professed worshipper of the beautiful; in fact, he had no other religion besides this, so far as I am aware, being an arrant pagan by nature and inclination. The beauty that was in man and nature he saw, and he idealised it in his works. He loved his work ardently; but it seemed to me rather as a faun might love his nymph than as a man would love his wife. The pictures which he painted, even before he had quite mastered the technical details of his craft, achieved a wide and remunerative popularity. They suited the taste of our sophisticated and voluptuous age. Many of his later productions certainly evidenced genius, working easily and confidently under the guidance of a refined taste, and with complete command of materials and processes. In fact, to my mind they were sometimes too soft and graceful; they needed a little of the ugliness and angularity of fact to give them relief. Be that as it may, they were the natural outcome of the man's personality. They were generally admired and purchased, and they brought him, while he was still young, more fame and profit than has been realised by all but a fraction of our modern painters. His

choice of subjects was various, but he commonly preferred the human figure, and was especially fond of painting young girls and children.

It is natural to suppose that a man so overflowing with life as Carlyon was should not be lacking in love adventures; and in one sense he doubtless did not lack them. All but a few women found him irresistible, and nobody who had witnessed his behaviour towards the sex could wonder at it. He seemed constrained by some indomitable instinct to do whatever was most pleasing to them, whether he would or no. I could imagine him, if he had lived two thousand years ago, standing heroic before an altar, crowned with flowers, while a galaxy of maidens bowed before him and sang hymns to his honour and glory. Very much the same sort of thing occurred as it was, only with a different scenic display, and with a broader delegation of ladies. And the hero accepted it all very graciously, but with a certain reserve. He never inclined to one worshipper more than to any of the others; no one could boast (or she regretted it if she did) that she had been preferred over the rest. Everything that was courteous, charming, sympathetic, Carlyon would be—and could not help being—to any of them; but as to falling in love, that, to use a vulgar phrase, formed no part of his programme. But why not? This was a question which everybody asked, and which nobody was found to answer.

I doubt whether more than one or two of

Carlyon's most intimate friends could have thrown any light upon the matter. But as I happened to be on the spot at the time of the beginning at least of the romance, I can explain it in some degree; not that Carlyon ever spoke to me of the subject. He was always singularly reticent about it, although reticence was not a marked trait of his character. We were in Rome together one winter during the Carnival, and while passing in our carriage up and down the Corso, Carlyon was much struck by the face and bearing of a lovely young girl on one of the balconies. From her companions and surroundings, it was evident that she belonged to the Roman aristocracy. I cannot at this time distinctly recall her features, though I remember well enough that the impression they produced upon me was of an almost ideal vision of female loveliness; timid and shy she seemed to be, but she manifested a charming girlish enjoyment of the scene and the excitement. Carlyon was captivated at first by the mere artistic enthusiasm which she inspired in him; but his feelings rapidly transcended this stage. As long as the Carnival lasted, he endeavoured, not unsuccessfully, to attract her notice by the ordinary gallantries suitable to the season; only, there was something about his bouquets and *bonbonnières* which distinguished them, in respect of taste and beauty, from any others. It was wonderful to observe Carlyon under the sway of this first serious passion of his; and I have often thought that,

could it have turned out happily, it would have made a better and sounder, if not a greater, man of him than he ever became. Before the Carnival was over he had found means to get presented to the head of the family to which this girl belonged. I was not similarly honoured, and was indeed not ambitious of becoming the *fidus Achates* of my friend in so desperate an enterprise as that to which he had set himself. Still less did I aspire to contend side by side with him as a brother-in-arms; though, there being, as I understood, another daughter of the family, I might have offered for her hand with quite as much ostensible chance of success, to say the least of it, as Carlyon had in his undertaking. I used to attempt seriously to dissuade him from courting what I maintained to be certain disappointment; but I might as well have bade the sun stop shining. 'I shall succeed!' he would exclaim, throwing out his arm. 'She cares for me already; and I have won the sister to my side: the sister will help me!' 'You had better be careful how you win the sister,' I would reply, smiling; 'you may chance to win her so thoroughly that she will feel inclined to keep you to herself.' 'Not she! she is a good-hearted creature, but marriage is not in her calculations.' 'And how are you off for rivals?' would be my next question. 'Rivals!' repeated Carlyon, scornfully. 'I have no rival worthy of the name. There is a little black-wigged, waxed-moustachioed, Italian nobleman,

about five and a half feet high, dressed like a barber and smelling like a civet-cat; he is the only rival I have been able to discover, and I would rather have him than not.' 'My dear fellow,' I answered, with a sagacious shake of the head, 'you have got the whole of mediæval and modern Italian history for your rival, not to mention the little drawbacks of your profession and means.' 'My profession!' cried out Carlyon, with an indignant laugh; 'where would Italy be, I should like to know, if it wasn't for her Art? And as for means, if she marries me, I'll become as rich as Barbarini himself.' 'You had much better come back with me to Paris next week,' said I, taking out my cigarette case with a sigh. 'When I come to Paris,' returned Carlyon, with firmness, 'it will be with my wife on my arm. And if you are going to smoke, I wish you'd go and do it somewhere else: I don't like it.' 'You had better think over my advice, however,' I remarked, as I walked away in compliance with his request.

Of course, I knew that he would not take my advice; and to tell the truth, though I felt obliged to administer it, I half cherished a secret notion that perhaps his suit might succeed after all. With the lady herself there would doubtless be little difficulty; it was with her family that the battle must be fought. But great as were Carlyon's disadvantages from a worldly point of view, I always considered that his manner and personal influence alone were worth as much as ten thousand a year to

him; he fascinated men as much as women, and the old nearly as much as the young. He was a brilliant exception to rules in most of the relations of life, and why not here as well? What a triumph it would be if he really did marry her!—a triumph which I, as his friend, should enjoy only less than himself. 'Who can tell?' I said to myself; and when I took my departure to Paris next week, it was with anticipations on his behalf not altogether gloomy.

In about a fortnight I received a despatch from him which startled me. 'Meet us at Marseilles on March 1,' it ran. 'We shall be married there, and then take a sailing vessel to England.' A few directions followed, but nothing in the shape of an explanation; and so the letter closed. It was dated at Rome, February 15, and had been five days on the road. I sat down and thought it over.

One thing was evident—that this was no orderly proceeding, but an elopement. Carlyon had conquered the girl, therefore, but the family had remained obdurate. What had been the course of his proceedings I could only conjecture, and to this day I am without any preknowledge on the subject; but no doubt there had been passion and romance enough in it to furnish forth a dozen ordinary love affairs. In fact, if Carlyon's feeling for the girl had not been quite overmastering, he would never have consented to bring her into a position so questionable as an elopement implied; and she

must have loved him with more than Italian ardour thus to follow him to what might be shame, and must be, in the eyes of her own society at least, disgrace. But the danger of compromising their social standing was not the only danger which I feared for the lovers. The family to which the girl belonged was a powerful one, and could and would put all the machinery of the Italian police in motion to stop the fugitives. Should Carlyon in that case resist, as I could not doubt that he would do, the consequences might be disastrous. Then, too, he would have jealousy and revenge to reckon with; it was not to be supposed that his five-foot-six rival, though he might dress like a barber and smell like a civet-cat, could sit down quietly under such a defeat; if he did not challenge Carlyon to fight a duel, he would be as likely as not to find an opportunity to drive a stiletto into him. Altogether, the outlook was not pleasant.

However, my part in the adventure was simple enough; and two days before the appointed time I started for Marseilles. Having made all preparations for the reception of the couple, I sat down in my hotel parlour and waited. The first of March came and passed, with no sign from those I waited for. The same thing occurred on the second day, and again on the third. I will not attempt to describe my anxiety during this period, which was increased by the fact that I could do nothing either to enlighten myself or assist them.

To be brief, a week passed by without any news whatever. On March 8 I made up my mind to go to Rome and try to find out what might be going on there. But an hour or two before I was to start my door opened slowly, and Carlyon came into the room.

'You need not ask me anything,' he said, putting up his hand as I rose to receive him. 'You see I am alone; that is enough for the present.'

He looked like a man in whom feeling, hope, and joy had been burnt out. His brows lowered, but did not frown: his eyes were dull and slow of movement; his face was pale and drawn, and his voice monotonous. He was also dragged down by fatigue and sleeplessness; and, as I afterwards learned, he had scarcely eaten anything in the last two days. He sat heavily down in a chair, resting his elbow upon the table, and his head on his hand. He vouchsafed no response to any of my remarks, and it was not long before his head drooped, and he fell into a deep but disturbed sleep. After some two hours of this he awoke and asked for food; he devoured what was brought in silence, then flung himself on the couch and slept again till evening.

That night he told me something of what had occurred; but the narrative was broken and imperfect, and the few facts I have been able to add to it go but a little way towards making it complete. The arrangements made for the escape were elaborated to the best

detail; the sister was the only third person cognisant of the plot, and she was scarcely less interested than they in its success. The rest of the family remained profoundly unsuspicious; and, as for the undersized rival, he had even made advances towards Carlyon of a friendly nature, and had on one occasion actually induced him to smoke a cigarette of a peculiar brand and flavour, which the Italian recommended as having been manufactured specially for himself, but which Carlyon abominated as much as he did all forms of tobacco.

On the afternoon of February 26, the two sisters with their governess drove out of the Porto del Popolo, as far as the Ponte Molle. Arrived there, they got out of their carriage to enjoy the shadow of the curious grove of cork-trees which grew in that neighbourhood. While thus engaged, one of them—Carlyon's lady-love—stumbled over a root, and sprained her ankle so badly as to be unable to walk or stand. All this, of course, was in accordance with the preconcerted plan, and was intended to mislead the governess, and through her the family at home. The other sister now set off in search of help to convey the pseudo-invalid back to the carriage; and the latter presently despatched the governess after her, on some errand designed for the occasion. The coast having been thus cleared, Carlyon emerged from the ambush; and half an hour later the lovers were being driven at full speed down the road to Civita Vecchia.

There was nothing in all this to lead them to suppose that they had been discovered or betrayed; and for an hour all continued to go well. Then they were startled by the report of a musket; and the carriage came to a standstill. Conceiving at once that they were attacked by banditti, Carlyon got out, ready to come to any pecuniary terms, if only they would allow the carriage to proceed. Some dozen men crowded round him, their faces disguised; they refused to listen to his offers, and some of them seized him by the arms and attempted to throw him down: A violent struggle ensued, and Carlyon succeeded in shaking himself free; but scarcely had he done so when a shot, fired by a short man whose figure and movements he thought he recognised, grazed his chest, and the next moment a heavy blow behind the ear knocked him senseless. When he came to himself he was lying at the side of the road, alone, with only the stars to look down on him. But the leathern satchel into which he had put the money for the journey he found close to him, pinned to the earth by a knife thrust through it.

I agreed with Carlyon in regarding this latter circumstance as a proof that the attack was no piece of vulgar brigandage, but a plot laid and carried out to frustrate the elopement; nor could I deem it unlikely that the rival whom he had despised was at the bottom of the affair, having in some way contrived to get wind of Carlyon's purposes. Be that as it may,

Carlyon's reverse was complete and immediate. He never saw the girl again; and though during the next three or four days he tried and risked everything to get some intelligence of her whereabouts, he failed to light upon any trace of her. It was his persuasion, however (and one which subsequent discoveries tended to confirm), that she had been temporarily confined in a convent; and her family perhaps intended, after having thus punished her, to make her the wife of her Italian lover. This event, however, did not take place, possibly owing to the refusal of the poor girl herself, possibly to other causes. What ultimately became of her had not transpired; she was nowhere seen in society after this disastrous episode, and the only reasonable inference is that she took the veil; for, having lost her heart's world in Carlyon, the common world of men and women could have no charm for her.

The shock did not kill Carlyon, as at first I half feared it might do, but it struck a coldness through his sunny and ardent nature that never again was absent from it. In less than a year he was at work painting once more; but it was observable that he now preferred the kind of success that can be measured in concrete returns to that which contents itself with nothing less than the admiration of the few who see and know. The money that he so rapidly made he as rapidly spent; and it would sometimes happen that he sold and was paid for pictures long before they were painted. Nevertheless,

so great were his facility and reputation, that it was hardly possible he should want for funds as long as his faculties and health remained to him. His mode of life in other respects was more or less open to the charge of cynicism—not cynicism of the showy Byronic order, but of an ingrained, involuntary sort. He did not look forward or upward, but practised that philosophy which aims to live upon whatever enjoyment may be extracted from the hour which passes; doing this in no reckless vulgar style, but in a methodical way, adapting the gratification to the capacity: as an epicure stints himself on one dish in order to keep his palate sensitive for another. He deferred more to the social *convenances* than he had been wont to do; not, as he once said to me, because he deemed them worthy of respect, but because he knew of nothing else more respectable. He often bore himself genially, and uniformly with a certain gentlemanly magnificence; but he would not invite anyone behind his reserve. Occasionally he would disappear for weeks at a time; and though he was always careful in such cases to forewarn his acquaintance of his departure, and to account for it on some professional pretext or other, nobody ever knew whither he went, or what he really did. Some declared that he spent the time living a semi-savage life among the Chinese Tartars, others opined that he smoked opium and gambled in the sailors' slums of Liverpool or Hamburg. There was

of course no authority for such grotesque conjectures, but they were significant as reflecting a general impression that Carlyon's visible civilised existence was an inadequate expression of what was in the man, and that his nature demanded and would take an occasional revenge upon itself.

Such was the famous artist, at whose studio door I knocked the afternoon of my disappointment about Monsieur Maximilian.

CHAPTER III.

I HAD noticed, as I turned the corner of the quiet side street in which the studio was situated, a figure come out of the door and set off in my direction. As well as I could judge at that distance, it seemed to be a man rather under the middle height, and foppishly dressed, though not in the correct Bond Street style. After advancing a few steps, this individual appeared for the first time to catch sight of me: he stopped, hesitated, and finally turned round and hastened off the opposite way. Neither the look nor the bearing of this fellow pleased me at all; and a passing curiosity visited my mind as to what could have been his business with Carlyon.

When I entered the studio, Carlyon's back was turned towards me; he was standing with both elbows on the mantel-piece, and his head

supported by his hands. As he faced me with a start, I could not help remarking that his expression was discomposed and his visage a little flushed, and there was visible in the hollow of his left temple a small dark red mark in the shape of a Greek cross. It was a birth-mark, but it had this peculiarity, that it never appeared except when Carlyon had been under the influence of a violent passion or emotion. I myself had only seen it twice before this; and its presence now was consequently worthy of remark.

Not that I actually made any remark about it; the youthful days were long gone by when any such liberty could have passed between my friend and me: our intercourse was doubtless easier than it had been of yore, but that was only because it sounded shallower depths. I made as if I had observed nothing at all unusual in Carlyon's aspect, and he, after a moment or two, regained his composure. We shook hands, and I sat down in a low easy-chair which stood beside a three-legged Chinese tea-table. I was on the point of laying my hat upon this table when I noticed that it was already occupied by a large pocket-book, open and apparently empty, and by a fine cambric pocket-handkerchief, from which emanated a sweet but somewhat sickly perfume. I turned to put my hat on the floor at the other side of the chair, but the thick turkey carpet was scattered over with cigarette ashes. All these intrinsically trifling matters produced a certain impression

upon me. The pocket-book was undoubtedly Carlyon's—I had seen it before; the perfumed handkerchief and the tobacco-ashes were as undoubtedly not his. On the other hand, they might very well have appertained to the over-dressed personage I had just met in the street. He had been in this chair not many minutes ago; and Carlyon's evident discomposure could hardly have been unconnected with his presence. What did it all mean?

Nothing of any consequence, of course. Carlyon had acquaintances, made on the Continent or elsewhere, of whom I knew nothing. This man might merely be some model of his, who had aroused his wrath by being impertinent; or some person with whom he had money transactions; or a chance bearer of ill-tidings. No matter: I had confidence enough in my friend to believe that if he were in a real strait he would not hesitate to let me have the opportunity of assisting him. So I began at once to talk in a comfortable tone about my meeting with the little boy, my invitation to him, on Carlyon's behalf, to come and be painted, his acceptance of the invitation, and his failure nevertheless to appear. 'But I will collar him yet, one of these days,' I concluded, 'and fetch him here.'

'I don't think I shall ever paint any more children,' said Carlyon, with a perverseness that sometimes came over him.

'It certainly does need a very rare power,

in a very perfect state of activity, to do them justice,' I replied with beneficently mischievous intent. 'It would not be surprising if you feel less disposed to it now than you were, say, fifteen years ago.'

'You think so too, do you?' said he, in a grave tone. 'Well, that is the worst sign yet!'

'You are not such an ass ——' I began, laughing; but he took me up with the same gravity as before.

'I am not such an ass as not to know that I am not the man I was. I know that I am a cheat, and I know other men that know it and rejoice in it, because they look forward to the time when I shall be no longer the fashion. I understand more than they do, and am a cleverer workman; but I sell my muse every day for money, and now I feel that she has begun to deteriorate in earnest: and when I am dead—or sooner, maybe—what I get a sovereign for now will be thought dear at a shilling. I used to think that I could pick myself up whenever I chose, and unite the brilliance of my charlatanry to the purity and insight of my earlier work; but I have found out my mistake.'

I was rather overpowered by this unexpected outbreak of grim earnestness. The remark by which I had provoked it was a piece of raillery, intended merely to divert his mind from the painful preoccupation which seemed to have taken possession of it: I had fished for

a contradiction, and had brought up a bitter self-indictment. But he was not done yet; and, thinking it might be wholesome for him to unpack his heart with words, I sat silent.

'After all, I have only painted what I am,' he said, walking up and down the floor. 'There is a sort of sincerity in it, just because it is a cheat. In the old times—in the young times—I could paint a soul because I believed in a soul; now I paint outsides, because—no, not because I believe in outsides, for I don't—but because I don't any longer see anything else. I was very hard hit once—you know all about that: I won't say now that I wish it had happened otherwise; but it shut up something in me that has never been opened since; something without which no man can paint or write or think anything that will last. I have done things of late years, without thinking or caring, which would have made me blush only to hear of when I was twenty-one. It's a plausible superstition that we are punished for our sins; it's nothing more than a superstition; but when evil things happen to us, we search our memory for whatever we have done in defiance to our childish conscience, and say, "This is God's revenge!" More likely it is blind chance; but we never can be satisfied without inventing a cause for everything. It is a strange thing, though, how fast the connection between that assumed cause and the effect sometimes appears to be. There does

seem to be revenge at work somewhere: though . . . . I beg your pardon, my dear fellow. Let me offer you a glass of wine—what will you have? I froth away, you see, and mean no harm, somewhat as I used to do when we were boys together. I don't know what makes my mind run so much on those young times, this evening. I'm getting stale, I suppose, and need a change. By the way, I'm going to have it. I think of running over to Norway next week, to be gone a month.'

— 'What; in the middle of the season?'

'All the better; London is perfect where it is, but not so pleasant when you meet it on the Continent. I have given my old housekeeper leave of absence from Saturday night. If you would like a lounging-room, where you can be entirely quiet and free from interruption, I'll give you my pass-key, and you can come in here whenever you like. Of course, I don't say that you can bring anyone else with you.'

'I shan't want anybody else; I still find myself tolerably endurable company; and I accept the key with thanks.'

'I used rather to patronise you once upon a time,' remarked Carlyon, gazing at me with a wistful sort of smile, that reminded me of his boyhood. 'I fancied I was the bigger fellow of the two. Mercy on us! what hollow humbug it all is! I will tell you what men are—they are fishermen's nets cast in the sea of human nature. Some of us catch a shoal of fish; some only two or three, or none—according

as we are cast by the Fisherman. Whereupon we ignore both the Fisherman and the sea, and take all the credit and discredit of the fish to ourselves. I present you with the idea in the rough; you may work it up in a sonnet, if you write sonnets still.'

'*A propos* of what is all this?' I asked.

'Of your saying you could endure your own company. I punish myself with mine; and so it happens that I get a good deal of punishment. I am not proud of my fish any longer. We are all nets of various capacity and various luck; but it is the sea and the Fisherman that are responsible for whatever value we may possess.'

'I think we have the faculty of opening ourselves to let the fish in, or of closing ourselves to keep them out—if I may venture to discourse in your figure,' remarked I.

'Or of making holes in ourselves to let out those that are in,' Carlyon added. 'But the utmost we can do is no more than is incumbent upon us as nets, and so nothing to brag about. How old did you say that little girl of yours was?'

'Do you mean Max? He is about five, I should think.'

'What did you say was his name?'

'Max.'

'Max! Max what?'

'I didn't ask. The patronymic would make no difference in the portrait, and that was all I was thinking about.'

'"And then he didn't turn up any more? Well, it's just as well, as it happens. But the world is a small place; he and I may come across each other some day or other. This is an inn of strange meetings; of course, all artists' studios are that. If I were a murderer, I would give myself out as an artist, hire a studio, make a trap-door under the throne, and after I had taken off the heads of my sitters (who should all be my enemies), I would pull the catch and let them tumble into the *oubliette*. No safer place in the world for a murder than a studio. No one knows who your models are.'

'That is a fact that might work both ways, if your model should happen to cherish a grudge against you.'

'It is not so easy to plot against a man in his own castle. However, I have never committed a murder, and they say no man begins to murder after the age of twenty-eight; so I have lost my chance. There might be an extension of time in applying the rule to ladies; so there, as elsewhere, they would have the advantage over us. Yes, I have missed an opportunity; it is too late. To go to Norway is a poor substitute.'

It was in rather an excited manner that Carlyon's last two or three speeches had been made, and he had become more and more restless, walking to and fro, standing or leaning for a moment or two in various attitudes, and moving or touching various objects in the room.

He now came near me, and noticed the handkerchief and pocket-book on the table. He took them up hastily, slipping the handkerchief into the side pocket of the purple velvet lounging sack that he wore. 'Disorderly beggar I am!' he said; 'always leaving my things about, and forgetting them. If I could choose what to leave and forget, it would be better. But these are the things that are always turning up again; and things you would ransack the universe for you never find. What original observations! I am entering my second childhood. Probably I have lived long enough. Here is a curious thing, by the way; this morning I was going to imagine myself doing something which I intend to do next week, and I found my imagination a blank. I could not think of myself as doing anything after next Sunday. Did such a thing ever happen to you?'

'Not that I can remember.'

'It affected me very much, as when, in Africa, walking along a plain, suddenly the familiar horizon line seems to stop or sink, and you find yourself on the brink of one of those perpendicular cliffs. The world, so far as you are concerned, stops short at your feet, instead of keeping fifteen or twenty miles ahead of you as usual. And the only warning you had of it was that strange blank—just before you stepped into nothingness.'

'It seems nothingness to you, then?'

'In one sense it does; not in another.

Once I rowed out to sea alone in an open boat, and between the fog and the currents, and the easterly gale, I was very soon out of sight of land, and lost. By the next morning I had given up all hope of outliving the adventure. There was nothing about me but mist and blankness, out of which came great sliding, toppling waves. All the world seemed dispersed for ever; but I never felt my own personality so intense and overpowering as then. All that boundless vagueness that was round me seemed to press me into myself—to crush me together, but never to crush me out. Not only this physical bundle of nerves and substances—I wasn't so much conscious of that—but that part of a man which says "I," and is made up of memory and tendency, combined in a certain shape and proportion. It was that that became more and more vivid and compact as the end drew near and the waves ran higher. And then I thought to myself, "Whatever happens to my flesh and bones, the thing that says 'I' will be just as capable of saying it in an eternity hence as at this moment." But it was only a moment after this that the fog drifted aside, and revealed the shore only a few hundred yards off. And as soon as I set eyes upon it that pressure of the immensities was relaxed, and I felt an infinite deal less alive than I had felt at any time since death came near.'

'It is odd I never heard you mention that before.'

'Well, perhaps you will never catch me in the gushing mood again. I do feel a sort of light-heartedness, like a man who has just got money to settle an old score that has been galling him. Unluckily, there is not the slightest warrant for such light-heartedness in my case; quite the contrary. But, as we used to say when we were boys at school (there I go again, you see), I don't care. The master may thrash us; but that is soon over, and by-and-by we get our diplomas all the same.'

'So, then, my Max is really not to have his portrait painted?' I said, getting up to take my departure. 'If you could have set eyes on him I'm sure you could not have resisted—for Norway or any other reason. I wonder why he didn't keep his appointment.'

'Some people are superstitious about having their faces copied,' Carlyon remarked. 'Probably the boy's mother has some such scruples on her son's behalf. Must you be going so soon? Let me see you again before I go—or, no, perhaps it will be better not; I shall be busy. At all events we will say good-bye now, and count it so much to the good if it turns out not to be for the last time. Farewell! You needn't say anything about my Norway plan until I am well out of the way.'

CHAPTER IV.

No doubt there was reason enough why I should dream of Carlyon that night; and perhaps there was material enough in what I had heard and seen on the foregoing day to furnish the dream with an adequate basis. Not that I am in the least satisfied by the common explanations, which are no explanations, of dreams: and, at all events, I hold them to be of two kinds—those which are devised by the dreamer's own rudderless and drifting brain, and those in which the helm is taken by some intelligence independent of his, and the mind guided to regions which it could not have reached by any force inherent in itself. Everybody, I suppose, has once or twice in his life a dream or a vision of this kind. The dream I am about to relate was, I believe, my first experience of such things. It was as vivid and consistent as reality itself, and the mark it made in my memory was that of an intimate personal adventure or catastrophe.

It seemed to me that I had decided to see Carlyon again before he left. I had something that it was highly important to give him; though whether it was advice or some more concrete commodity I do not now recollect. I was in great haste, however, my impression being that he was on the point of setting off on his journey, and that I was in danger of being

too late. I hailed a hansom therefore, and promised the driver an extra sixpence to drive fast. We rattled along the streets. I noticed that the shops were closed, and that the streams of dark-garmented people were moving slowly along the side walks; showing that it was already Sunday in my dream, though, in reality, it was on Friday night that I dreamt it.

We pulled up at the studio door; I paid and dismissed the cabman, and rang the door-bell. I heard it sound upstairs, but there was no response. After ringing several times, I bethought myself of the pass-key which Carlyon had given me. Putting my hand in my pocket, I found it there, and I at once opened the door and ran upstairs. It is a curious circumstance that no misgiving lest Carlyon might have already departed occurred to me at this time, though that is the inference I should naturally have drawn, in a waking state, from his not having answered the bell. But I knew, in some inexplicable but (to me) perfectly sure way, that Carlyon was in his studio; and, moreover, that some one else was with him there.

I entered the studio without knocking, and it did not surprise me to observe that I was not seen either by Carlyon, or by his companion. I was, in fact, invisible; and my object in coming there, as it now seemed, was not to make any communication, to execute any commission on my own part, but simply and solely to witness what was taking place between

Carlyon and the person with him. I had already recognised this person; it was the same foppish and objectionable creature whom I had seen in the flesh on the occasion of my previous visit. My dislike towards him was confirmed, but at the same time modified in some odd manner; as if, having objected to him at first on an erroneous conception of his character, I had afterwards learned to know him and dislike him more thoroughly on truer grounds. He was sitting in the low easy-chair beside the little table, and talking volubly in a singular voice—a voice that was by no means disagreeable in its quality, but on the contrary melodious and flexible, but which, nevertheless, had an unwelcome and, as it were, an unnatural effect in coming from him. He held, between the ring and middle fingers of his left hand, a partly-smoked cigarette. It had gone out, and presently, perceiving this, he placed it in the little silver ash-receiver which stood on the table; then he got up from his chair and approached Carlyon, who had been standing with his arms folded and his shoulders resting against the mantel-piece, and who had not yet uttered a word.

A sort of division of consciousness now took place in me; while remaining the invisible spectator of what was going forward, I at the same time entered into Carlyon's mind, and in so far identified myself with him. The disagreeable stranger was thus a stranger no longer: I was latently aware of a familiarity

with him dating back over many years: we had not always been on ill-terms with each other, and at one epoch we had bound ourselves together by an irrevocable bond. This bond, however, had afterwards become intolerable to both; Carlyon was technically the most to blame, and outwardly suffered the least. Bitter hatred consequently, intensified on Carlyon's part by the discovery that he had been cunningly deceived where he had trusted most implicitly, sprang up between the two: and latterly affairs had been approaching a crisis. This very day, just before my arrival, a final proposal had been made by the visitor and rejected by Carlyon. What would be the next thing to happen?

'Nothing will move you, then, from that decision?' said the visitor, standing before him, and looking up with a keen slantwise glance into his face,

'Nothing; and you may do your worst; cannot be worse than that.'

'What sacrifice would it be to you? would go away, and leave you free. It is a mere form—the speaking of a word that costs you nothing, and yet, *to us*, will make all the difference between light and darkness. It is not the money—I would waive that. Nor need it limit your actions, if you should wish to form other ties. My position shall be a secret between you and me to the end. I ask no more than what you owe it to me to give.'

'If you needed only a drop of blood to

keep you alive, I would not give it you. You deceived me beyond any limits of forgiveness, and traded on that deception for years. I call it an offence worse even than the betrayal itself, that you induced me to feel a sort of compassionate tolerance for you, by means of it. You invited what befell after that, and I will never lift a finger to compensate you for it. My only regret is that I should have debased myself so far, in a moment of pity and weakness, as to consent to that which you now call injury.'

'You are a bold man to say all that to me.'

'I do not happen to be afraid of anything you can do.'

'Ah yes, you are stronger than I am; you could knock me senseless or strangle me to death. Perhaps you mean to do so. Do you know that I have those letters in my pocket at this moment? Why don't you take them from me and destroy them?'

'If you were to put them in my hands, I would give them back to you. I care for no further concealments: I am sick of them. I have long been tired of this kind of life. I want a change; and the change which you can bring will be as welcome as any other.'

'Carlyon, you hate me!' said the other. 'Do you think I hate you?'

'It is the only agreeable thing I can believe of you.'

'It was not because I hated you that I am what I am! You have refused my request,

and you defy my revenge. But I will do something that you do not think of. I will remember the old time. What I have done, I did as a duty to myself only. You will not look at matters from my side; you will not admit my temptations, or my excuses. But it suits me to admit yours; to acknowledge that I wronged you; and to do—this!'

So saying, the speaker took from his pocket a small bundle of four or five letters, and tore them rapidly into small pieces. As he did so, he kept his eyes fixed upon Carlyon, and when he had done he threw out his arms and gave a light laugh.

Carlyon emitted a deep sigh, and unfolded his arms.

'Why did you do that?' he demanded, after a pause.

'So as to give myself the right to do something else.'

'What is that?'

'To ask your pardon.'

Carlyon gazed steadfastly at the other, and I perceived the thought crossed his mind, 'Is this another deception?' But then he reflected that it could not be so; he had seen with his own eyes the destruction of the only testimony that could be used against him. However much reason he might have to hate this person, the deed which had just been done was a noble deed. It might not recompense him for years of barren life, but it was none the less a great and honourable forbearance on the other's part.

It demanded some acknowledgment. A tenderer feeling struggled into Carlyon's heart. He stepped forward, and held out his hand.

Then I regretted that I was invisible, and could make no sign, nor speak any warning word. For I was aware of a fearful peril menacing Carlyon, of which he could know nothing. With all my might I struggled to cry out, to fling myself between them; and in that vain struggle I awoke, shuddering, with the wet hair clinging to my forehead.

CHAPTER V.

WHILE the first impress of this dream was yet strong upon me, I had no other thought than to go straight to Carlyon, and relate it to him. But it was still early morning; and by the time I had completed my toilet and eaten my breakfast I had begun to look at the matter from a more common-sense point of view. A dream is only a dream, after all; and that which appears terrible to the sleeper may wear a different complexion when reviewed by daylight. Moreover, the waking mind is apt to give to the disordered events of a dream a logical sequence and precision which were probably in reality wanting to them; and finally, the familiar facts of every-day life—the chairs and tables, the view from the window, the rattle of vehicles in the street, and the voices

of men and women—all tend to make the vision of the night more unsubstantial than a thought. By ten o'clock, accordingly, I had resolved to forego my intention of bursting headlong in upon Carlyon with a tale of horror and warning; I even doubted whether I would attempt to see him at all previous to his departure; or, if I should do so, and the story of the dream were to come up, I would tell it from the humorous point of view, leaving Carlyon to draw from it what conclusions he pleased.

In this convenient frame of mind I sat down to smoke my morning cigarette over my Saturday newspaper. In the midst of that employment Carlyon himself came in. He appeared to be in excellent spirits, and the vigour and liveliness of his aspect put in a ridiculous light my misgivings of the night before.

'Don't disarrange yourself, my dear fellow,' he said; 'I can stop only a moment. I expect to start by this evening's train. You will find the studio all right for you, if you should want to go there at any time. I have got the duplicate pass-key from my old housekeeper, so you must be careful not to lose yours, or you will be locked out till I come back.'

'You are certain you won't stay over Sunday?' I could not help saying.

'Not so far as I am aware at present,' he answered, without any symptom of compre-

hending my drift. 'I want to be at my destination not later than Wednesday. That fresh atmosphere will clear away the cobwebs that have been entangling my wits of late. Such sloughs of despond as you saw me wallowing in yesterday must be abandoned for good and all. When you next see me, you shall behold a transfiguration.'

'Have you any messages that I can deliver for you?'

'There are some friends of mine to whom I might wish to leave a parting word,' said Carlyon, with an ambiguous smile; 'but as they don't happen to be people you know, and as the message would be the reverse of complimentary, it is no matter.'

'Well, may you return safe and sound!' said I.

'If one could leave the greater part of himself behind him on a journey, or at least such a bundle of his more disreputable belongings as Christian carried on his shoulders, what a wholesome thing our holiday jaunts would become, and how at a loss our friends would be to recognise us when we came back!' Carlyon remarked. 'If returning safe and sound means returning with as heavy a weight of moral adipose tissue as you started with, it is hardly so friendly a wish as it was meant to be. But I am wasting your time and spending too much of my own. I didn't want to leave you with such an impression of me on your mind as you must have got yesterday. Think

of me as you see me now, and forget my metaphysical hypochondriasis!'

'We have known each other for a good many years, my dear Carlyon,' I replied; 'and my impressions of you are not detached, but composite. I fancy nothing could greatly modify it either way. Your lights and shadows, as I have become accustomed to see them, make your reality to me, and I could hardly imagine you apart from any of them. I don't think I should even care to see you transfigured until I had become transfigured myself.'

'Upon the whole, that is as comfortable a thing as you could have said to me,' he remarked; 'and yet it tempts me a little to put you to the test with some confession or other—I don't say with one that would tend towards the transfiguration!' He paused a few moments, looking at me with a doubtful expression. 'No,' he went on, 'no; I won't risk it—at any rate, not now, when I shall not be in the way of relieving you, for a month to come, of any bad impression you might get from it. It's enough if I hold it over you for a future occasion. For the present, let the lights and shadows remain as they are!'

He laughed, grasped my hand with more than usual heartiness, and went out. I was left to resume my communion with my morning paper. But, if I remember aright, I did not read any more that day. I went to the club for my lunch, and stayed there till evening. At ten o'clock I repaired to Mrs.

Blessington Wagner's, where I half expected (it being a musical evening) that I might meet the Countess Felicita. But she was not there, and I came home tired and rather depressed.

I do not ordinarily attend church, and Sunday is apt to be rather a long day with me. But on this occasion it happened to come across me that the Countess had promised to sing the anthem at a certain fashionable church not far from my abode; so I betook myself thither, and sat in a retired pew and listened to her grand contralto voice—one of the most touching and stirring voices I have ever heard. In the afternoon I was enterprising enough to go down to her modest little house in Chelsea to call on her, but she was not at home. I left my card, and strolled eastwards along the bank of the river. Once I thought I caught a glimpse of my faithless little friend Max; but before I could confirm my impression a knot of half-tipsy fellows got in the way. When they had passed, the only justification for it that I could discover was a hideous little wretch in a soiled and ragged flannel shirt, who stared up at me with a pair of pale, red-rimmed eyes, set in a thin, grimy little face. All of a sudden he uttered a shrill howl, and bolted down a crooked alley opening out of the main thoroughfare.

My rest for the two last nights had been rather disturbed, and I anticipated nothing better for the third; but my expectation was not verified. I slept soundly and dreamlessly,

and did not awake till after my usual hour. There was an improvement in my spirits also; I felt as if some tedious suspense or anxiety had come to an end. I made up my mind to visit the studio during the day and look over a collection of etchings which I knew Carlyon kept in a drawer of his ebony cabinet. As I proposed to spend several hours in the inspection, I put a little bundle of sandwiches in my pocket—wine I knew I should find on the premises. It was about noon when I unlocked the door with the pass-key Carlyon had given me, and went upstairs.

The door of the studio stood ajar, and when I entered I found that the green shade of the main window was drawn, so that the room seemed quite dusky. The air, too, was close and oppressive. I pulled up the blind, and then went to the small window in the alcove, which I opened at top and bottom. Having thus relieved the gloom and freshened the atmosphere, I turned to the cabinet. It was a handsome piece of furniture, standing against the wall at the end of the room farthest from the door. The upper part consisted mainly of folding-doors opening on shelves; in the panels were set mirrors of plate-glass with bevelled edges. At the sides was a sort of light scaffolding of brackets supported on slender carved pillars, each bracket bearing a small vase of some quaint design. The lower portion of the cabinet was a chest of solidly-made ebony drawers, with curiously-wrought brass handles.

It was in the upper one of these drawers that the etchings were kept.

I pulled it open, and, seating myself before it, began to examine the collection. They were mostly the work of the older masters. Among them were a number of very rare and exquisite prints of Rembrandt. I was especially struck by one plate, representing three trees standing close together, their thick foliage intercepting the light of the bright sky behind, which streams in mellow lustre through the spaces between their trunks. While studying it my eye was attracted to the edge of the paper, on which appeared a peculiar dark stain. It was neither black nor brown, and was evidently not caused by ink, as I had at first supposed. It was not even quite dry, and the paper around it was slightly wrinkled, the result of the unequal contraction occasioned by moisture. For some reason this spot fascinated me; I was repelled by it, but was thereby only the more impelled to scrutinise it. What could have caused it? There was nothing to answer the question in the thing itself; but I presently bethought me to investigate the drawer. Stuffed away in one corner, corresponding to that part of the paper which had been stained, I immediately discerned what I took to be one of Carlyon's painting rags, such as he used to wipe his brushes upon or smear his canvas. It was clewed up in a small bundle, scarcely so large as a clenched fist, and so much discoloured that its original whiteness was scarcely distinguishable. Taking

hold of it gingerly by its least soiled part, I drew it forth and held it up to the light. Its folds stuck together with a kind of glutinous tenacity. The colouring-matter with which it had been saturated was still partially wet; here and there it had a faint glisten, and in one place where the light partially shone through the fabric the hue was of a deep clouded red. What could have possessed Carlyon to put a rag in this condition into a drawer full of priceless etchings? It could not have been there long—hardly longer than since the day before. But on that day Carlyon had expected to be on his way to Norway. Yet, who could have placed it here if Carlyon had not? I looked at it more closely, with a quickened beating of the heart. A strange odour, resembling no other odour in the world, now became perceptible. I recognised it at once, and it swept me to the conviction against which I had from the first been unconfessedly struggling. It was the smell of human blood!

The moisture left my mouth and throat, and there was a fluttering of the nerves in my head nearly resulting in faintness. But in a minute or two I got the better of my weakness, reminding myself that either there was worse to come—in which case I should need all my self-control—or else this was all, and, in that case, it was nothing worth disturbing oneself about.

I unfolded the rag, which appeared, so far as I could judge, not a rag, but a small handkerchief, of fine make and material—probably

cambric. One corner of it had been either torn or cut away. It was heavy with blood; so much could not have flowed from any ordinary wound. My mind had now, in self-defence as it were, adopted a strictly logical humour; all imaginative speculations were rigidly suppressed, my determination being to take nothing for granted until sensible evidence had assured me of its truth. If anything disastrous had happened, it must have happened within the four walls of this studio, and I should inevitably come upon further traces of it in due time.

Having laid the handkerchief across the edge of the open drawer, I prepared to rise from my chair to begin my exploration of the room. I was encouraged to think that the worst thing discoverable could not be there, because, had it been there, I could hardly have escaped noticing it on my first entrance. But an instant's recollection admonished me that the blinds had then been drawn, not only obscuring objects in the studio, but causing me to confine most of my attention to setting the blinds to rights.

As these thoughts strayed across my brain I was sitting facing the mirror in one of the panels, and my eyes were dwelling upon its surface, on which was a tiny round spot like a silver globule, caused, I suppose, by a bubble of air in the glass. It stood out distinctly against the darkness of the reflected room behind it—not that the room was really dark any longer, but it seemed so in the mirror. Moving my head a

little, however, I brought the globule into line with a lighter portion of the background—so light that I thought it must be a bit of white cloth hung over the back of a chair. For the first time, I now looked past the surface of the mirror into its depths. The white object was very white, and it appeared to rest on the back of a chair, but it was not a bit of cloth. It was oblong in shape and had two darker spots upon it. I strained my eyes further.

All at once, with a spasm of sharp astonishment, I knew that this white object was the face of Carlyon, who was sitting in a chair and apparently returning my gaze. In the instant of recognising him, I also realised how profoundly I had foreboded calamity the instant before, and the revulsion was staggering. In the same breath of time I was irritated against my friend for being, whether intentionally or not, the cause of my having had such a scare. I did not look round at him, therefore, but sinking back in my chair I said sulkily, 'Well, Carlyon!'

My voice sounded thin and hollow in the lofty room, and there was no response whatever from Carlyon. After a moment my feeling of relieved irritation—if I may so call it—vanished as suddenly as if it had been snatched away by some spiritual hand. The feeling which occupied its place was one of alert horror, such as I cannot describe. I slowly sat up again in my chair, and once more looked into the mirror. There was a slight tremor in my head not to be

controlled, and which rendered distinct vision difficult, but I could see that Carlyon's face was set in an odd and very awkward attitude; it was tipped over towards his right shoulder in such a way that it reminded me of the grotesque contortion of some grimace-making clown at a pantomime. But the clown's contortion was momentary, whereas Carlyon had retained his present attitude certainly for several minutes, and possibly for longer—very much longer. The whole figure, as well as I could discern it in the glass, had a rigid twist in it, much at variance with Carlyon's customary poses of robust grace. One of his hands seemed to be clenched and partly raised from the arm of the chair; but the attitude of the head was the most unnatural of all.

I was humouring myself—struggling to withstand the inrush of the truth until I could gain time to face it resolutely. But the sensation that the thing I dreaded was behind me, and, as it were, staring over my shoulder, became at this point unendurable. I got up from my chair with a start, turned round, and with measured but leaden steps walked up to the seated figure and steadied myself to look at it.

The ungainly immobility of death is hideous to contemplate. Its unstudied effects, its unshrinking sincerity, put life to the blush. The soul, as if to show its contempt for the carcase it has ceased to inhabit, throws it at parting into some antic attitude of forlorn abjectness

that would excite ridicule were it not so unaffectedly ghastly. As I looked at the body I was sensible of a feeling of shame for my friend's sake. It was as if some malignant enemy of his had, in his absence, set up this dishonourable scarecrow effigy of him by way of satirising the real man's conspicuous and perhaps not unconscious physical picturesqueness. And the worst of the jest was that Carlyon would never return to efface the absurd impression of him thus created. Neither, however, would he ever know how vilely he had been traduced.

But I forced down the hysteric mood that threatened to gain possession of me, and set myself to examine the body. The chair in which it was seated was drawn up to the little tea-table which I have already once or twice mentioned. There was a vacant chair on the opposite side of the table, suggesting the idea that some person had been conversing with him first, previous to the catastrophe. Upon the table was a silver ash-receiver, with a half-smoked cigarette lying in it. Another object was there—an open razor, the handle of which was smeared with blood, though the blade had apparently been wiped nearly clean. It was one of Carlyon's own razors, for there was his name engraved upon a silver plate set in the handle. There were no traces of a struggle. The body, though somewhat contorted, as I have said, could not have risen from its seat before death overtook it. It lay back, with one leg stretched out, and the head twisted back and sideways

towards the shoulder, which was spasmodically drawn up. The eyes were wide open and the eyebrows lifted; the set teeth were visible through the parted lips. Across the throat was a deep clean cut, separating the jugular artery and dividing the windpipe. A great effusion of blood had taken place, drenching the collar and neck-scarf, and flowing down into the shirt-front. There were no other wounds; but evidently that one had been sufficient.

I cast my eyes about the room in search of whatever traces of the murderer might present themselves. But everything seemed to be in its proper place. Upon the rug in front of the fireplace, however, I noticed two or three scraps of torn paper, and upon the hearth below the empty grate a number of similar scraps had seemingly been burnt. I picked up the largest of the unconsumed scraps and examined it; it had only one complete word written upon it, and that was the name of a town in Holland—Amsterdam. The handwriting was Carlyon's.

There was nothing further that I could do; the only further thing to be done was to discover the murderer, and the task of doing that devolved upon others than I. My duty now was to apprise the police of what had occurred, and let them set about their work, with the assistance of such information and suggestions as I might find it possible to afford them. Before leaving the studio, I returned to the remains of the man I had loved, and contemplated them attentively for a long time. The

first nervous agitation had passed away from me, and I was glad to remark how little the dead reminded me of the living. The effigy was a poor one; many a modern caricaturist, methought, would have succeeded better. Carlyon, my friend, had been a being quite different from this. My eyes fell upon the remnant of the cigarette. I picked it up and put it in my cigarette case, for it recurred to my memory how I had seen it in my dream two nights previous—a dream which I was now disposed to believe as prophetic. A few minutes later I had closed the street door behind me, and was hastening along the road in search of a policeman. Having met with one and told him briefly what had occurred, I despatched a telegram to Scotland Yard and then accompanied the officer back to the studio.

CHAPTER VI.

THE murder of a man like Carlyon Drake was not so every-day an occurrence that it could fail to throw society into something like a panic; and, happening as it did in the height of the London season, there was no lack of discussion about it. The newspapers had their articles—moral, historical, and philosophical, together with minute details of the circumstances under which the body was found and the efforts which the police were making to discover the criminal.

My own unlucky name of course figured prominently wherever reference was made to the affair; and I believe that not a few of my acquaintances imbibed the idea that there was good reason to suspect me of being the murderer. It required all my determination not to leave London at once. At this juncture I received a note from the Countess Felicita, the purport of which afforded me the first gleam of comfort I had enjoyed since the calamity had taken place.

'Dear friend,' wrote the Countess, 'I have a closer interest in the terrible topic which is now being everywhere discussed than most people know. I met Mr. Carlyon Drake several years ago on the Continent, when he did me a kindness which I shall never forget. Since that time I had seen nothing of him; and though, when I came to London, I hoped that we might meet each other at the house of some common friend, that did not happen, and I was unwilling to seem to force myself upon his notice. I was not aware until a day or two ago that you were so intimately his friend. I wish you would come here and speak to me about him; I also have something to say. I found your card here the other day, so you must know where I live. I shall be at home to-morrow evening after seven o'clock, if you can come.

'Very cordially yours,

'FELICITA LARINSKI.'

I have not as yet had an opportunity to do more than allude to the Countess Felicita. My acquaintance with her, although not of long standing, was a fact of no trifling moment to me; for I had found her to be a woman who was capable of affording, to a mature and somewhat fastidious man of the world like myself, a companionship for which I had cause to be morally and intellectually grateful. Very few of this type of women, I suppose, exist; the combination of qualities necessary to their evolution is very rare. Though essentially and inwardly feminine, they must possess a masculine breadth and elasticity of mind; and there should be a vein of sympathetic kindliness, not incompatible with an arch and subtle kind of wit, in all their manifestations. Such women must have had a varied and genuine experience of life, which they will use as a magic wand to touch into significance and relief the subject of the moment. What particular form of religious belief they hold is of small import, provided its tenets constitute the real basis, impulse, and criterion of their lives—mere scepticism fatally unsexes the woman who in other respects may be all loveliness. Furthermore, they should possess, and dare to use, the power of compelling men to forget their external charms in the enjoyment of that spiritual correspondence of beauty which is neither intellect nor education, but rather a graceful conformation and behaviour of both. To this end, however, it is desirable on all accounts that their physical

attractions should not be too poignant; a moderate comeliness is quite sufficient, but I apprehend that genuine homeliness is the best of all. The man is then relieved of the conventional obligation to be complimentary, and the woman from the distraction of expecting compliments, and both are as much at ease as, and yet under a much finer social stimulus than, either could be in the company of his or her own respective sex.

To return to the Countess. She was a woman certainly not less than thirty years old, and probably not more than thirty-five. What her nationality was I did not know; her husband had been a Pole, and she spoke English with ease and accuracy. Her marriage was understood to have taken place at a comparatively early age, but she soon became a widow, under somewhat tragic circumstances. She subsequently lived in Paris and in Berlin, and was on a familiar footing with the people best worth knowing in both capitals; and she was believed to be acquainted with the inner history of many of the chief political movements of the day. At the outbreak of the Franco-German war, her sympathies were on the French side. She travelled with the army in the capacity of nurse, and appears to have been the object of the same kind of affection among the soldiers that Florence Nightingale inspired at the Crimea fourteen years before. There were many anecdotes of her courage and devotion. She was in Paris at the epoch of the

Commune, and afterwards she lived for a time in Italy. When I first met her, a few months previous to the date of which I am now writing, she had not been in London above a year; her fortunes were at a low ebb, but she was bravely supporting herself by the exercise of her extraordinary talent for music. She had sung in the choirs of more than one church, set numberless songs to music, and instructed pupils. Meanwhile, by dint of the sterling value of her mind and talents, and by a pleasant and unassuming geniality of manner, she made and kept many warm friends among both the men and women of the best English society. Such is a brief synopsis of so much as was generally known of what would seem to have been a noble and self-sacrificing life, deeply tinged with sadness and misfortune, but never losing heart or forfeiting the respect of honourable people.

For my own part, however, I had never concerned myself much with the Countess Felicita's past career. My theory was that a human being is worth to me exactly as much as I find in her or him, and that to allow my opinion of one whom I have made my friend to be influenced by the echoes, good or bad, of her previous history would be tantamount to resigning the possibility of contracting any secure and independent friendship at all. In the Countess Felicita I saw a woman to whom I could express those shy thoughts that reside in the best and most really enlightened parts of a man's mind, assured that they would be received by

her kindly and comprehendingly, and would call forth from her a responsive and suggestive train of reflections and remarks. Her influence upon me, from our very first encounter, had been at once soothing and awakening; her receptiveness enabled me to reveal to her whatever small stores of wisdom or avenues of speculation I had lighted upon, while her comments had virtue in them to throw a fresh light on my subtlest and most novel ideas. She really knew more of my true character and impulses than any other woman, or any man either, has ever known; and in return I could flatter myself that I had obtained a deeper insight than most of her friends into the motives and conclusions of her own conduct of life. Let it not be inferred, however, that our conversations always or often took a personal turn; on the contrary, it was very seldom that either of us attempted to introduce—save in the way of illustration—any definite facts or particular persons wherewith the chances of existence had brought us into contact. Our intercourse was carried on upon a higher plane than that of the individual; and our pleasure in it depended upon this condition. There was something more than friendship in my regard for the Countess Felicita; but if it had never kindled into love, it was because she had avoided offering, as much as I had shunned seeking, any passionate grounds of sympathy. The bloom of the world was something sullied for both of us; and I had not had confidence to try, with

jaded pinions of forty years, the romantic flights which had failed at twenty-seven.

Nevertheless, had I happened to think about the matter, I might have perceived that the Countess was quite as capable as she had ever been of winning a man's whole heart. Handsome she certainly was not; I should rather say she was noticeable for a wholesome and intelligent style of ugliness. It was a likable and interesting ugliness; the parts were good, though the combination was eccentric. She was somewhat above the average height of women, her shoulders were square and high, and her neck short. The lower part of her face was heavily and resolutely built, and her mouth was large, but the upper lip was finely and sensitively moulded. Her nose was broad across the nostrils, and rather flattened throughout its entire length; her eyes were very far apart, and unevenly set in her head; they were as black as Erebus. Her hands and feet, however, were exquisitely and poetically formed; and her hair, which she wore short, was wavy and fine, and matched her eyes for colour. The movements of her features under the influence of thought and feeling were more eloquent than their form; and her gestures, and a way she had of suddenly leaning forward when she was talking and supporting her elbow on her knee—these and other unstudied things that she did, and which the absence of conventional beauty enabled her to do with impunity, imparted a force and character to her conver-

sation which kept the attention of her interlocutor agreeably alert. Her voice was soft and clear and susceptible of delicate shades of emphasis, and her smile was intelligent and quick.

I was sometimes myself surprised at my knowledge of these and other details of the Countess Felicita's personal appearance and bearing, for my opportunities of observing her had not been very many, nor under what would ordinarily be considered especially favourable conditions. In other words, we had met only in the way that men and women are accustomed to meet in London society—in drawing-rooms, at afternoon and evening receptions, at dinners and music gatherings, in the box at the opera, at art exhibitions. A hundred other male acquaintances of hers had the same facilities of intercourse with her that I had, and might have overheard almost every word we uttered. But a familiar experience of social forms enables one to accommodate them pliantly to one's occasions instead of being any longer hampered by them; and not infrequently they seem to give a freedom and independence that might not be arrived at so easily in circumstances less ostensibly public. There is pleasure and profit in many kinds of outward restraint and etiquette; they give the mind liveliness, and the precision arising from the necessity of immediately and economically accomplishing its purpose. I was aware that the Countess gave afternoon teas at her little house in Chelsea

every other Friday during the season; but I had never up to this time happened to attend one, partly from accident, partly, no doubt, because I was aware that my chances of talking with her would be less available in her own parlour than in anyone else's. Nor had I ever called upon her alone (except upon the one occasion already mentioned, when I did not find her at home). I was a bachelor, and she a widow of several years' standing; and it is well to give no opening to the forays of idle tongues, even when, as in our case, the persons most concerned might have afforded to disregard them.

At a juncture so exceptional as the present, however, the rules that apply to ordinary contingencies may, to a great extent, be safely transcended; and I recognised without hesitation the fitness of the Countess Felicita's straightforward invitation. Hitherto we had met upon impersonal grounds; but now a friend of both of us had, by his death, imposed upon us the need of a more confidential sort of communion. I wrote a reply to her note at once, and between seven and eight o'clock I presented myself at her door.

CHAPTER VII.

I FOUND the Countess Felicita dressed in a close-fitting black gown, with a white collar and cuffs, and round her neck a heavy antique gold

chain and locket. Her dark complexion was more than usually pale, and as I entered her black eyes met mine rapidly and searchingly. The hand that she gave me was as cold as death.

'I am glad you answered my letter,' she said; 'I was afraid you might not come. Ah! you too look harassed.'

'The dead have it all their own way; but they don't let us have ours,' was my reply.

'Yes; they are free,' rejoined the Countess, glancing round the room and sighing. 'It is the murderer that suffers the real death.'

The news had evidently stirred her deeply, and the presence of one who had almost, as it were, heard Carlyon's dying groan affected her still more. During the first few minutes of our interview she scarcely maintained her usual self-control, and her eyes constantly followed all my movements and the changes of my face. I had never before seen her under the sway of strong emotional feeling, though I had doubtless been indirectly aware of her capacity for it; and the spectacle softened and composed in some measure my own distress. For a time we spoke on indifferent subjects, and only in the tones of our voices did our true preoccupation appear. At length she asked me whether the police had made any discoveries.

'They are following out the clue I gave them,' answered I; 'but thus far they have come upon nothing.'

'You were able to give them a clue?' she

said eagerly, folding her hands and leaning forward.

'Not one that can be considered very satisfactory, though it has more weight with me than it probably has with them. A few days before his death occurred I saw a man leave the studio, and going up immediately afterwards I found Carlyon looking greatly disturbed.'

'Could you describe the man—identify him?'

'He did not come near enough for me to distinguish his features; but his figure and general appearance I should know again.'

'Ah! I am afraid that would not do,' said the Countess, unclasping her hands and leaning back. 'So many figures are alike—it is the face only that is distinctive. You could not swear to a figure. I do not say that the man you saw may not very likely have been the guilty one; but, unless other testimony pointed to him, he will escape.'

'Yes; you are right,' returned I, debating within myself whether I should speak of my dream. Did the Countess believe in dreams?

'Is it true what the papers say—that he was on the point of leaving the country?' she presently asked.

'He told me that he was to start for Norway on Saturday night; but he must have altered his plans, for the physicians who have examined the body say that death could not have taken place earlier than Sunday afternoon or evening.'

'Then, you did not expect to find him when you went there—on Monday, was it not?

But then, how did you get in? Had the door been left open?'

'He gave me his pass-key to use while he was away, and I went up on Monday to look at his collection of prints. But the murderer must have been aware that Carlyon was intending to be absent for a month or so, and have based his calculations upon the probability of the crime not being discovered for that length of time. If he had chosen any other moment, of course, Carlyon would have been missed at once; but, as it was, the body was (as far as he could know) safer in the studio than it would have been at the bottom of the Thames.'

The Countess reflected silently for a few moments, taking her chin in her hand and moving her foot on the floor at intervals. 'Shall I say something to you?' she asked in a low voice, her eyes directed downwards. 'If you were not his friend, and if I had not been his friend, I would not say it. It is between you and me.'

'You may say anything to me, Countess.'

'I have been thinking about him,' she went on, in the same tone; 'how he was strong both in light and in shade, vehement sometimes; one found him sad and gloomy without knowing why; life would seem hateful to him. And he believed that we had rights over our own selves—that there was no obligation except respect for the rights and freedom of others. Was it not so?'

'It was very much so, no doubt. You knew him better than I supposed.'

'Oh, he did not disguise himself; it was not difficult to know so much. But then I have been thinking, also, that he was not a man likely to make enemies—not deadly enemies. I cannot think that he would so injure anyone as to make them feel like that. It is easier to think that he had fallen into some misfortune—perhaps something that he would consider a disgrace. The horror of thinking that the world might hear of it——'

'I see what you mean, dear Countess,' I said, glad to interrupt her in what I perceived was a painful explanation; 'and you will be relieved to know that the circumstances under which the body was found make it impossible that death should have been caused by his own act. Two facts alone are enough to dispose of that theory.'

'Ah! the newspapers had not said anything that . . . . Yes, it is a relief. Tell me how you can know?'

'In the first place, the drawer of the cabinet which I opened to get at the prints had in it a handkerchief soaked in blood, and not yet entirely dry; it must have been put there at the time of the murder. The cabinet is at least twenty paces from the chair in which the body was seated, and it is impossible that Carlyon should have been able to walk there and back after having cut his throat. The other circumstance is that the razor which I found lying on

the table, although it was within reach of his hand, had been wiped dry—probably on the handkerchief, but evidently not by Carlyon. I presume that the murderer, after having done the act, lost his head for a few minutes; his first impulse was to remove the traces of blood from the razor, in order to conceal the fact that it had been used for the purpose. Then it suddenly occurred to him that it might be practicable to suggest suicide; and he left the razor on the table and hid the handkerchief away in the drawer. He would have probably taken it with him if he had not been afraid of getting blood-stains on his clothes. It would have been more creditable to his presence of mind if he had left it on the table with the razor.'

I had intended to say more, but the Countess prevented me. She had risen from her seat, and was stretching out her arms, with averted palms, as if to keep back the vision which my too rudely-chosen words had summoned up. Her eyes were half-closed, and the eyelids quivered.

'Hush, hush! You do not know what you are doing!' she said, under her breath. 'I cannot listen to those things—I have told you that I knew him! Oh! oh! I have seen murder,' she went on, suddenly pressing her hands over her eyes. 'Blood is a fearful thing to wash a handkerchief in! It dizzies the brain and quells the heart—and then they come and reason over it, and say how and why . . . Do

not look at me! Do not listen to me!' She sank down on the couch, and turning away her face sobbed heavily for several minutes.

It was an outburst worthy of a tragic actress, but it was evidently not acting. I received from it an impression of the power and vividness of the woman's nature which, well as I had fancied I knew her, took me by surprise. In casting about for the probable cause of such an exhibition of feeling, I somewhat hastily ascribed it to a tenderer interest in Carlyon than she had given me cause to suspect. But before long she corrected my misapprehension. Raising herself from her recumbent position, she passed her hands through her hair, checked her uneven breathing, and looked at me with a smile.

'I will not ask you to pardon me,' she said; 'because, if you require my excuses, I shall be inexcusable to you. Your words brought back other times to me—terrible times. I have never spoken to you of my husband. He was a conspirator and a Pole—he met the fate of many who loved their country; and I saw his death—a bloody and violent death. One does not forget those things—they are as present to-day as ten years ago! It is a strange thing; on battlefields I have seen so much of death, and it all passes away; but that one little scene of a few minutes—never!'

'I can only say how grieved I am to have caused you pain; I have been so accustomed these last days to discuss the matter with the

detectives that I have dulled my own sensitiveness to it. Carlyon was my dearest friend.'

'Is no one known who is likely to have had a motive to wish his death?'

'Only one person that I can think of; but that happens to be one who might perhaps answer the description of the man I saw,—who might have been an Italian, as well as of any other nationality.'

'An Italian?'

'The man I am thinking of was an Italian nobleman, of whom Carlyon has often spoken to me. A number of years ago Carlyon was very much in love with an Italian girl, who loved him—the story is too long to tell here, and would not interest you; but the gist of it is that the family did not favour him, and that when he attempted an elopement he was stopped and wounded by a body of men dressed like banditti, but led by one whom Carlyon recognised as this nobleman, who had also been a suitor for the girl's hand.'

'But if the rival was the conqueror, why should he wish to take Carlyon's life now?—if that is your meaning.'

'She was lost to him as well as to Carlyon; she entered a convent, I believe—at all events, she never married. That was enough to make an enemy of the Italian, who would look upon Carlyon as having blasted his hopes of love or fortune; and possibly there may be circumstances occurring afterwards to embitter this enmity. I know that Carlyon has lately

had anxieties and troubles which he would not explain.'

'All that is very ingenious,' said the Countess, after a little thought. 'Yes—yes—it is more than ingenious; it seems to me probable—most probable! You have never, of course, heard anything to lead you to suppose that this Italian might not be living?'

'No, nothing either way; but in the ordinary course of nature he would live for many years yet.'

'Yes; and the ordinary course of nature is not departed from so often as some people would try to have you believe. The more I think it over, my friend, the more sure I feel that you have hit upon the right solution. It cannot be difficult to follow out such a clue. This Italian can be traced; he must have been seen and known in London; the nature of his dealings with Carlyon will be discovered. Yes, I feel that it will be so! Perhaps, even, I may be able to give some assistance. On the Continent I knew many persons, Italians and others. Promise me that you will let me hear whatever news there is to tell, so that we may consult together.'

I was glad to promise this; for the intuitions of a woman like the Countess Felicita, guided and restrained as they would be by her masculine judgment and clear sense, were by no means aids to be despised. I took my leave of her soon afterwards, with the understanding that we were to see each other shortly

again. It was not until I had regained my own house that I bethought myself of having omitted to question her concerning the nature of her past relations with Carlyon. But there would be opportunity enough to do that in the future. Meanwhile the Countess shared with poor Carlyon the privacy of my thoughts. She would have been a fit mate for him. She would have been a fit mate for any man; and fortunate would the man have been who could have won her!

CHAPTER VIII.

SEVERAL weeks passed by, and the end of the London season was at hand. Carlyon's name had faded gradually out of the newspapers, and people had ceased to make conversation out of his tragedy. His murderer had not been found. The police had in one or two instances hunted out persons who had seen, or thought they had seen, somebody resembling the description that I had given of the mysterious Italian. One witness went so far as to affirm that he had noticed Carlyon and the other alighting from a cab in the neighbourhood of Vauxhall Bridge. This event had happened only a week or so previous to the murder, at about nine o'clock in the evening; but the information was somewhat discredited by the addition that the two had a little child with them, who was very sleepy, and whom the taller

of the two gentlemen (Carlyon) took up and carried in his arms. No child, sleepy or otherwise, had entered into the speculations of the police. Nevertheless, the incident was noted down, in order that even the most improbable contingencies might not be neglected. 'It often happens, sir,' remarked my particular crony among the detectives—a broad-faced, genial-looking gentleman by the name of Duffield—'It often happens that the most unlikely and flimsiest things are the very ones that tell which way the wind blows.' I assented to the general principle; but it is evidently one liable to hopeless abuse.

During this period I had become a constant visitor at the house of the Countess Felicita. The new and intimate turn that had been given to our friendship by Carlyon's death had undergone no abatement; on the contrary, it grew more controlling day by day. I felt myself strengthened and completed by her companionship; and my own society was no longer so adequate to my needs as it had been at the time when Carlyon and I talked about it. She, on the other hand, seemed to lean more and more on me, and continually opened to me new treasures of her heart and mind. No word of love, however, had as yet been spoken between us. We had no lack of subjects of conversation; and so long as mystery still enshrouded Carlyon's affair, it seemed fitting that we should keep silence upon what lay yet nearer to our souls.

One surprise the Countess had had in store for me. Going there one afternoon, I found her with a child standing at her knees, absorbed in watching her manufacture of a paper cocked-hat. The child looked up, and I recognised my little friend Max of Kensington Gardens. The Countess probably noticed my astonished expression, and smiled.

'Max, do you remember me?' I inquired. 'How long have you been acquainted with this lady?'

'Yes, I remember you,' replied Max, in his childish French. 'You gave me the big apple; but Auntie would not let me go for the picture.'

'And who is Auntie?' I further demanded.

'I will explain the mystery,' interposed the Countess, laughing. 'I was the person who was responsible for Max's failure to keep his appointment. I gathered from what he said that Carlyon was the painter to whom you meant to take him, and I feared—foolishly, perhaps—that it might seem like an indirect approach on my part to send him there. Max is my nephew,' she added; 'but I am his father and mother as well, for they are dead.'

'This is a new page in the romance,' I said.

'It refers to an earlier page,' rejoined the Countess—'one which I have been intending to read to you. Max is associated with my relations with Carlyon. Max is the child of my brother-in-law, who died some years after my husband. The child was already motherless,

and he had no one to come to but me. But I was at that time living near Paris, and Max was in Russian Poland—an infant among strangers. I had met Carlyon only a week or two before; he discovered, I hardly know how, how the case stood—that Max could not get to me, nor I to him, for in that part of the world I should have been liable to arrest. Besides, I had not the money for so long a journey. Without saying anything to me, he set off the next day, travelled to Poland, found Max, and returned to me with him. And that was not all. Just before we left Paris, I received a draft for a large sum of money; there was nothing to tell from whom it came, except my own certainty that it came from him. I wrote to thank him, and to tell him that it should be repaid the moment I had the means to do so; but it was a long time before I got any answer, and then it seemed to me cold and evasive. He did not wish to be reminded of any obligation to him, and he declared that I owed him nothing. I have never been able to repay it, and now it is too late; but until I had done so you will understand that I could not feel at ease to force myself into his presence.'

This story the Countess told rapidly, passing her hand occasionally over Max's hair, and glancing from him to me and back again. It put Carlyon's character in a somewhat new light; for though I had always known him to be kind-hearted, and ready to relieve distress, I had hardly supposed him likely so far to

sacrifice his convenience and leisure as to make a sudden journey of many hundred miles to oblige a woman whom he had known so short a time. But I was glad, even at this late day, to be able to do him fuller justice; and besides, as I have already intimated, two weeks of the Countess Felicita were equivalent to a lifetime of most other women.

As London emptied, the Countess and I drew nearer and nearer together. She and I and Max often walked together in the parks, or made little excursions up and down the river, to Richmond or to Gravesend. I did not purpose to leave town that summer; for I could find no holiday where the Countess was not. One warm August afternoon I ordered an open carriage, meaning to propose a drive to Hampstead Heath. On my way to her house a gentleman on the side-walk signalled to my coachman, who stopped, and the gentleman approached. It was my detective friend, Mr. Duffield, looking excessively genial.

'I fancy it will be all right now, sir,' he said. 'We have got hold of the right end of the string at last.'

'Do you mean that——'

'We have nailed the party,' said Mr. Duffield, in a husky whisper. 'You will hear more about it to-morrow morning, if not to-night. I thought I'd tell you, sir, beforehand, in case you should tumble upon it too sudden. Pleasant drive to you, sir.'

The coachman drove on. As might be supposed, I was deeply impressed by this news, and my first impulse was to tell it to the Countess. But on second thoughts I decided otherwise. I had set my heart on having a day of quiet and unsullied enjoyment, and I was unwilling to spoil it by the introduction of a subject so painfully absorbing as this would be to us both. As I drove along I thought I would avail myself of the soothing influence of a cigarette, but on examining my case it turned out to be empty. It was not quite empty either; for on shaking it out dropped the fragment of a half-smoked cigarette, the appearance of which showed it to be none of mine. For a moment I was puzzled to account for this; but the moment after I recognised the relic which I had taken out of the ash-tray on Carlyon's table. I examined it curiously. It was made of a peculiar paper, ribbed transversely, and stamped at the middle with a monogram or other device in gold. This was partly burnt away, however, so as to be illegible. 'But slighter things than that have hanged a man,' I thought, as I returned the relic to my case. 'I wonder whether my friend Duffield could have made any use of it!'

Alighting at the Countess's door, I was informed that she had just gone out, but would be back in half an hour. I told the coachman to walk his horses in whatsoever direction he pleased for that length of time, and then to return hither; and meanwhile, being indisposed

to sit in the house alone, I strolled down to the Embankment. But it still wanted some minutes of the half-hour when I turned once more into the Countess's street. Almost immediately I found myself looking with great earnestness at the back of a gentleman who was preceding me up the street at a distance of about eighty yards. He was dressed in a light summer suit, and on his head he wore a grey felt hat with a black ribbon. The attire I had not seen before, but every moment made me more certain that I had seen the man before; his gait, and the peculiar carriage of his arms, were terribly unmistakable. He hastened along, holding his head down, and was now within a few rods of the Countess Felicita's door.

A great clatter and rumbling, accompanied by cries, coming from close behind me, caused me instinctively to turn my head; and I saw a carriage drawn by two frightened horses come headlong up the street. No coachman was on the box, but I perceived a person in a coachman's blue coat and silver buttons running at full speed some distance in the rear. I stepped from the side-walk and succeeded in catching the bridle of one of the horses and stopping the progress of the carriage, which I then discovered to be my own. The coachman had left them standing at the door of a public-house, where they had taken fright and run away. The carriage had sustained some injuries, sufficient to render it unavailable for the projected drive; so, after rating the coachman soundly, I

sent him and the team back to the stables. But, meanwhile, the man in the summer suit had disappeared.

It was with very strange and bewildered feelings that I knocked for the second time at the Countess's door; but again I resolved to say nothing to her that might mar the enjoyment I hoped to derive from her society this afternoon. Besides, if Mr. Duffield were justified in his prognostications, the man whom I had seen was either not the murderer, or he would be arrested within a few hours. Let the coming hour be a peaceful one, therefore.

The Countess had returned, and would be down in a few minutes. I waited for what seemed to me a much longer time, but was probably about a quarter of an hour. Then she came in, evidently in unusually good spirits. Her dress was a dark crimson silk, made with a square opening at the throat, and with sleeves to the elbow. It became her marvellously well. She took my hand between both of hers.

'This is my birthday,' she said. 'They have not always been happy days of late, but I said to myself that this should be so, because you would be with me. Let us sit down on this sofa. Your hand is so hot! You haven't a fever, I hope? Let me feel your pulse—I am an old nurse, remember, and if you get ill I shall come in and do for you! But you mustn't be ill; you must be well and happy always. Ah me!'

'That sigh was not a happy one.'

'No; but I am an ugly old woman, who realises sometimes that these delicious days cannot last for ever, nor even many weeks longer. Where will you be on my next birthday?'

'No further from you than now, I hope.'

'I am going to Dresden in October to—never mind—to make my living. I have an offer of a settled income, which I must accept for Max's sake. There will be no birthdays there. Besides, I think this will be my last birthday; last night I dreamt so.'

'Do you believe in dreams?'

'Very much in some dreams. Of course you do nothing so irrational?'

'I had a dream last July in which I have believed a good deal ever since.'

'Oh, tell me about it! Was it all a dream?'

'It may have been a vision—a prophetic one. But it is not a pleasant subject, and I had made up my mind not to talk of anything unpleasant to-day.'

'But an interesting thing cannot be unpleasant, and this is very interesting. A prophetic vision! You must tell me! If you will, I will give you something that I know you like. Prophetic of what?'

'It is really nothing that one can be merry about. Well, it was two days before Carlyon's death; I dreamt that I saw the whole scene—the man and all—up to just before the deed was done. Then I awoke.'

The Countess's face had turned very pale, and she relinquished my hand. 'The man and all, did you say?' she asked, in a low tone. 'But you did not see it done; then what confirmation is it? How can you tell it was to have been a murder?'

'I knew the razor was in the man's pocket, and I saw his purpose in his mind. It was the same man I had met the day before in the street. And I saw him tear up some letters and pretend to ask forgiveness; and on the Monday after I found scraps of letters on the floor, and "Amsterdam" written on one of them in Carlyon's handwriting. The coincidences were all very singular. However, nothing has come of it yet. Why did you make me tell it? You are superstitious, and it has startled you.'

The Countess gazed at me fixedly for a long time; there was no expression that I could read upon her face. Finally she said, in a guarded tone, 'Why have you not told me this in all the time since then?'

'I'm sure I don't know. As you say, there's no confirmation in it; at most, there is a coincidence. I hate the subject. Let us drop it.'

The Countess got up and walked about the room, her hands clasped behind her head. 'I am more used to dreams than you are,' she said, at length, pausing before me. 'They mean something, but it is not all to be depended upon; in some parts it will be false. I do

not believe all of your dream. Yes, we will forget it for the present, and remember it is my birthday—my last birthday! Living is hard work; I wonder I have kept it up so long.'

'Would nothing reconcile you to living longer?'

She sat down again beside me. 'If the world could stand still, perhaps. It does not take long for me to live a great deal sometimes. I would not exchange a day full of those long sweet moments for a hundred years without them.'

'You must have been loved very much in your life, Felicita.'

She glanced at me between the lids of her eyes. 'No, I have not been loved,' she said, slowly. Then she went on with increasing rapidity: 'Why have you spoken that word? It is the word that holds life and death! No, I have never been loved; my name is a mockery. I have been admired, and respected, and liked, and cared for—not loved! Men have discovered that I had a mind; that amazed them so that they stopped. If they had gone a little further they would have been amazed indeed, for they would have found a heart! But a woman with a face like mine—her heart, if she is allowed to have one, must be friendly, or motherly, or sisterly; not passion, fire, love! My ugliness has masked my heart; and yet I have not the worst of it, for I have seen the beauty of an angel masking no heart at all—beauty that leads

you on with lovely promises, and leaves you at last in a cold emptiness. The path to me is a rough one; but the traveller who reaches me shall be warmed and fed. No, I have not been loved; but I have loved once, and I have been hated! If he had disliked me merely, I would have killed myself; but as it was—as it was —— why do you look at me so? Have I frightened you?'

She broke off, laughing. But she had not frightened me; she had kindled in me a fervour stronger than the fervour of youth. She had fully revealed to me how great a woman she could be. The words were words, and any other woman might have learned to repeat them, but to say them as the Countess Felicita said them, with her gestures, her tones, her language of eye and body—to do that was in the power of no other woman beside Felicita herself. And with her dilatation she made me great; so that although when I had thought her less than I found her now I had still deemed her more than my equal, yet this revelation of how far she surpassed my under-estimate of her revealed to me also the truth that there was in me a height to match her highest.

I took her hand and kissed it.

'You do not know what you have done,' she said, withdrawing her hand after a moment and laying it against her face.

'We both know,' I answered, gravely. 'Let it go no further now. I did not mean to speak

till to-morrow. To-day let us keep your birthday and be like children.'

'I am content; to-morrow may never come,' she answered. 'Yes, let us be children—and naughty children, too! I promised to give you something just now.'

She took from her pocket a small box of white glazed paper. On the back was printed in gold letters the name 'Felicita.' She opened it, and it was filled with cigarettes, beautifully made, and exhaling a delicate aroma. She held the box towards me with a smile; I took a cigarette and lit it, and she did the same.

'These are the best I ever smoked,' remarked I.

'There are no others like these,' she rejoined. 'They were made especially for me, and I never taste any other tobacco.'

'I have often wondered that you never smoked; all Poles do.'

'I am not a Pole. Have you never guessed my nationality?'

'French, perhaps—or Spanish? But you might be almost anything that was not English. What are you?'

'I am a Roman.'

'Roman? Italian?'

She nodded, wreathing the smoke through her nostrils. 'There was no nobler or more ancient family than mine,' she said. 'I had a sister, who was not like me; she was the loveliest girl in Rome. A young Englishman came there and fell in love with

her: and he honoured me by making me his confidant. Ah, me! How long ago it all seems!'

'Who was he?'

'A handsome fellow; no matter about his name—I have forgotten it. I believe he was a painter. You can conceive that my family would not be anxious to marry their daughter to an English painter. I told him that; but he believed he could do everything. It was a strange story. She loved him, too, with all the love she had.'

'What was the end of it?'

'Oh, it came to an end somehow! Let me talk; I like to romance once in a while, and imagine what might have been. Suppose, for instance, that I myself had grown to love this young Englishman, who so coolly used me as his go-between, without ever stopping to think whether I were flesh and blood or not. That would have made quite a complication, would it not? Then—let me see! Then we must imagine a rival suitor for my sister's hand; a rich countryman of hers, say, who had got the father and mother on his side. I, being jealous of my sister's Englishman, would naturally wish to separate them, and would scheme to play a double part between them and the rival suitor. . . . Truly, I think I have mistaken my vocation, and that, instead of being a musician, I should have been a novelist! Do you wish to hear more? You are not frightened?

'No; go on!'

'Give me time to think—improvising is not so easy as listening. Well, then, I would pretend to assist them in some plan of theirs to get married secretly; but I would take care that the suitor, with friends to help him, should be in wait. Then I innocently lead my two lovers into the trap—all because I loved the Englishman myself. You can imagine the rest for yourself, if you please.'

'Would you finally marry this Englishman?'

'Marry him? No! not marry him—quite! But I might go on loving him; and some day he, having partly recovered from the loss of my sister, and believing all the time that I had been sincere in my co-operation to bring about their union—some day, perhaps, he would come to love me; not much, but pretty well, as well as such men as he can love women as I; well enough to break my heart when at last I told him (as I would) that I had loved him from the first, and that it was my doing that the girl he had set his soul on had died in a convent.'

'And the Italian suitor—what becomes of him?'

'He is of no consequence—a mere stop-gap in the story. I should make him be killed in some duel or drunken brawl, like the empty-headed, petty-souled little fool he is.'

I wish I could describe the appearance of Felicita as she told this tale. She lay back on the cushion of the sofa, with one arm thrown over her head, while the other hand played with

the gold chain round her neck. Her face had a carelessness, and at the same time a depth and intensity, of expression strange to behold; her eyes burned and at the same time laughed. Her courage and quality were like those of some empress of old Rome, from one of whom, perchance, her line boasted its descent.

A gnat settled on my forehead; Felicita took her handkerchief and brushed it away. I took the handkerchief from her and pressed it to my lips. It had a sweet but rather enervating perfume, which I recollected having smelt somewhere before. The handkerchief was of the most delicate cambric, with a monogram worked in one corner.

A silence fell between us. It was broken by the voice of little Max, who presently came careering into the room. He was mounted upon a stick, and wore upon his head a soft wide-brimmed hat that was much too large for him. After riding up and down several times, curvetting and prancing like a veritable cavalier, he abandoned his steed, and, climbing up behind the Countess on a chair, he took the hat from his own head and placed it on hers. It fitted her perfectly, and well became her short black hair and dark features, to which it imparted a somewhat masculine appearance. It was a grey felt hat, with a broad black ribbon round the crown.

Felicita, preoccupied at first, had hardly noticed the boy or what he was doing. But now, putting up her hand and feeling the

hat, she snatched it off, and turned upon Max angrily.

'I have told you not to meddle with this,' she said to him. 'To-night you shall go to bed in the dark.'

Instead of taking this rebuke submissively, Max fell into a sudden rage. He struck fiercely at the Countess, and attempted to bite her hand. As he shrieked and struggled thus, his small visage scarlet with passion, I saw on his left temple a curious dark spot, a birthmark apparently; though, as I had never noticed it till now, it must have been one which only became visible under the influence of emotion. It was exactly in the shape of a Greek cross.

A sensation was coming over me as if I were walking in a dream. I looked at my cigarette. It was half smoked out, and was the facsimile of the one which I had found in the studio. But the monogram on it was untouched, and was of the same design as that which was worked into the handkerchief.

I rose and leaned against the table, facing the Countess.

'I know it all now, Felicita,' I said, quietly. 'This child is yours and Carlyon's. You came here to induce its father to legitimise it and rehabilitate you. To escape remark and identification you wore men's clothes when you visited him. You were dressed so when you made your final appeal to him that Sunday evening, when he rejected you; in order to put him off his guard, you destroyed those letters which he

had written to you, and which compromised him. They were the weapon which you had threatened him with; but you could afford to throw that away, because the other weapon which you had resolved to use was safe in your pocket. You softened his heart, and cajoled him into his chair, and then you came behind and murdered him. Is not that all true?'

'Yes; it was done so,' replied the Countess Felicita, whose gaze had not swerved from mine throughout this speech. 'Now, what shall you do?'

'Nothing—except leave you.'

'I will not be left. To-day I meant that you should know what you have found out for yourself; but I meant to tell it all in my own way. Then I meant to ask you whether you would stay or go. If you stayed, you should be loved and served more tenderly than any man was ever loved and served. If you went —I kept this!'

She put her hand in her bosom, and took out something, but she held it up in such a way that I could not see what it was.

She stood up and extended her arms towards me. 'Which shall it be?' she said.

There was a look in her face that pulled at my heart-strings till they snapped.

'If it had been anyone but Carlyon!' I muttered at last. 'But I cannot be false to myself and to him too. I must go.'

'Go, then; you are not worthy of what I could have given you!' said Felicita. 'But it

is I who leave you, not you me.' As she spoke, she lifted the object which she held in her hand to her mouth and appeared to swallow it. She stepped backwards, and sank upon the sofa. Max, who had stood silent all this while, now ran to her and threw his arms round her neck. 'I am sorry I was naughty to you, and I love you,' he cried, kissing her.

Just then the door opened, and my friend Mr. Duffield entered the room abruptly, with his hat on. But after a glance at the sofa he uncovered his head. His prisoner had escaped.

PAULINE.

CHAPTER I.

THE ARTIST AND HIS FRIENDS.

STEPHEN YORKE, born in 1840, the son of a Northumberland fisherman, was a few years ago the most fashionable portrait-painter in London. He was one of those men whose power and genius show in their faces, in their gestures, and in their whole presence. His brow projected massively above the eyes, which were large, slow in their movements, and at once comprehensive and penetrating in their regard. His nose was strongly and yet delicately moulded, denoting a vigorous personality and refined perceptions. There were indications of a generous animalism in his full mouth and chin; but the way his lips were set against each other, and the fine arch and space of the head above the temples, showed that he had not only kept these instincts in subjection, but had made them the trained servants of his art. Eloquent expressions kindled in his face, which was rather forcible than handsome: his voice had an ear-filling resonance, and was

singularly flexible. It was said of him that, by his looks and his tones, he could call any expression he desired into the face of his sitter; certainly, in many of his portraits, especially of women, the inner nature seems to stand revealed, so that to see them was almost equivalent to having an intimate acquaintance with the originals. Some people he refused to paint, on the rather odd plea that they had 'no backs to their heads,' and many readers may remember the sensation that was caused by his rejection of the beautiful Mrs. Montgomery's request to sit to him. 'Why not, in Heaven's name?' his friend Ivo Scott once asked him. 'Isn't she good-looking enough for you?' Yorke made no reply for about a minute, when he growled out, with a kind of fierceness, 'Because I'm not a libertine!' Scott (who was a son of Lord Cairngorme, and in the diplomatic service) walked off to meditate over this answer, but could make nothing of it. Six months later, however, when Mrs. Montgomery eloped with Captain Capello, he began to fancy he saw some light in it. 'That fellow Yorke,' he remarked, 'had seen what was in the woman; and he has such a confounded reverence for his art, or something, that he would neither paint it, nor paint her without it. It's a wonder to me how he ever gets on!'

Stephen Yorke got on very well, nevertheless. He had begun, like Benjamin West or William Turner, from the very bottom of the ladder, and he had honestly fought for and

mastered every step. It is not necessary to enter into the story of these early struggles, mistakes, successes, triumphs, disappointments. By the time he came up to London, he had travelled on foot over a great part of Europe, had deeply studied art and nature at every turn, and was already, though no one knew it then, a great painter. It does not say much for the enterprise of art-critics that he remained unknown for nearly a year, and that the man of all others to bring him prominently before the world was Sir Montagu Goldsborough, the banker, of Lombard Street, who understood no more about art than Yorke did about finance. But Sir Montagu, besides being a kind-hearted fellow at bottom, happened to be building a picture gallery at the back of his house in Prince's Gate, and wanted pictures to put in it. A dealer recommended Yorke to him, and the rest was easy. Art and Finance became very good friends, and mutually benefited each other. By the end of another year Yorke was as 'fashionable' as he could desire, and could make as much money as he pleased. But he was always an eccentric fellow, and the quaint, religious bias, which had been given to his character while still a boy in his Northumberland home, never left him. The Honourable Ivo Scott used to call him an 'old Puritan,' though, so far as age was concerned, Yorke was Scott's junior by two years. But he was the larger man of the two, mentally and physically: and the fact that Scott was twice as much a man of

the world as his friend scarcely balanced this advantage.

In spite of the difference in their education and philosophy, Scott was the most intimate friend Yorke had. Once, while walking together in the Alps, Scott's foot had slipped, and he had rolled down a steep incline two hundred yards to the bottom of a gully, where he lay insensible, with a broken leg. Yorke clambered down after him, picked him up, and actually carried him in his arms back to the path again, and thence on to the next village—a feat of strength almost incredible, and still remembered in those parts. Having got him to bed, Yorke set his friend's leg for him, and took the best of care of him till he got well. Scott always thereafter halted a little on his right foot; but he did not need that to keep him in mind of the other's kindness. The satirical diplomatist was not forgetful of services rendered him, though he was not given to gush. He glorified Yorke behind his back; and Yorke loved him.

Yorke's studio was worth seeing; it was full of irregular beauty in the way of ornamentation, draperies, vases, and strange plunder from foreign lands, not to speak of the multitude of studies, sketches, and half-finished pictures which hung or stood about the walls. The place was kept in order by a fine old personage, who rejoiced in the appropriate name of Raphael. His acquaintance with Stephen Yorke dated back to the period of the latter's infancy, for Raphael had been a comrade of

Yorke's father, and had faced along with him many a wintry blast on the German Ocean. At last their little vessel was driven by a storm on the Scottish coast: the elder Yorke was drowned, and Raphael suffered injuries which permanently lost him the use of his left arm. Being thus deprived of the means of getting his livelihood, it would have gone hard with Raphael had not Stephen heard of his plight and brought him up to London. The old fellow had a fine head and face, and a magnificent grey beard, and though full sixty years of age, his thews and sinews were almost as staunch as ever. Stephen often used him as a model, which tickled the vanity of the venerable mariner, and gradually brought him to the belief that his 'young master' was in no small degree indebted to him for success in his profession. He moreover caught up a number of artistic phrases, which he mingled in the oddest manner with his own seafaring speech, and considered that he was thereby justified in asserting himself as an art-critic and connoisseur. All this delighted Stephen, and the relations between the old sailor and the artist were of the pleasantest and raciest description. They chatted together in their native northern dialect, recalled old times, laughed and growled, and altogether behaved more like a couple of boys than like an old man and a younger one. Raphael was one of the sights and attractions of the studio, and the visitor generally followed the example of the master in allowing him great

liberties. He kept the door, and denied entrance to callers gruffly, or permitted it importantly, as the case might be; entertaining no doubt that Stephen, and himself through Stephen, were the two most considerable people in London, and therefore in the world. Whatever his idiosyncrasies of behaviour or opinion, he was as trusty and competent a henchman and factotum as ever artist had; and Stephen, who was accustomed to value men on the basis of their manhood, and not for any accidental gloss of education or faculty that they might chance to have added to them, was wont to think and to say that Raphael was as good a man as he, and a much wiser one.

It may thus be seen that Stephen Yorke, though not at first sight a man calculated to get on very smoothly in the most unconsciously artificial society in the world, had nevertheless gathered round him a few cordial and sound supporters. In fact, he had nearly all the things that ought to make a man feel secure and happy; and happy he was in his own fashion, most of the time. For all that, there were one or two matters that troubled him.

CHAPTER II.

LEAVEN FROM AMERICA.

On a certain fine afternoon in July, the redoubtable Raphael being left in solitary command of the studio, and having set the two easels and the throne in readiness, and done whatever other little job he could think of about the place, had picked up a copy of the *Morning Post* from the sofa, and was occupying himself by spelling out some of the fashionable intelligence. He had just made the acquaintance of the important fact that a marriage had been arranged between Percy Gordon, Esquire, nephew of Sir Tobias Gordon, Bart., of Cedarhurst, and Lady Cicely Pope, only daughter of the Earl of Eightoaks. 'Ou aye, I remember that lass,' said Raphael to himself; 'Master Stephen and me did for her last spring, and a right fair bit of work it was, that it was, though I says it as shouldn't!'—and was going on to learn that Sir Montagu Goldsborough had entertained a select circle of friends at his mansion in Prince's Gate last night; covers were laid for thirty; among the guests were Lord Scatterblunt, the Honourable Ivo Scott, Mademoiselle Gordoni . . . . He had got as far as this when his studies were interrupted by the sharp ringing of the door-bell. Raphael lifted his starboard eye to the brass face of the tall Norman timepiece in the corner, saw

that it was close upon three o'clock, laid down his paper, and rose to his feet.

'Six bells!' said he, pulling down his jacket and giving his beard a twist. 'Twill be Sir Montague and Miss Gabrielle. And Master Stephen not to the fore. Well, well; for my part I'm all the easier. She's not the lass for him—not ballast enough to my mind. If 'twas madmerselle, now . . . . but no matter!'

Thus soliloquising, he drew aside the *portière* that concealed the door, and opened it. Immediately a tall, brown, grave-looking gentleman entered, with a rapid decisive step, and a keen enterprising eye. He held a card-case in his hand, and after advancing a few paces into the room he halted and faced the astonished Raphael, measuring him from top to toe with a glance.

'How do you do, sir?' he said, in a dry leisurely voice. 'My card—I am Colonel Sparks, correspondent of the *New York Universe*, and agent of the American Grand Opera and Concert Combination Troupe. You are a famous man, sir; your name and your works are familiar to the American public. I am proud to meet you'—here the Colonel took Raphael's hand and shook it; after which he put his card-case in his pocket and produced a note-book. 'I am come, sir,' he continued, with a slight bow, 'to inspect your picture of Mademoiselle Gordoni. I should state that we propose to run the Gordoni as prima donna of

our troupe, and we may be induced to purchase this work, if we can agree on terms. We calculate it might be useful as an advertisement.'

'You seem for to be a man of many words, mate,' returned Raphael, 'but I don't think I rightly understand you. Would you see Master Stephen Yorke?'

'Are you not that gentleman, sir?' demanded the Colonel, warily.

'Me? by no means! My name is Raphael——'

The Colonel forsook his impassivity for a moment, and started visibly. He regarded the ancient mariner with a surprise that he scarcely attempted to conceal. 'I assure you, Mr. Raphael,' he presently said, 'that this is a gratification I hardly anticipated. You are even a more distinguished man than your famous colleague, and your name is, I may say, a household word among the æsthetic circles of the States. Allow me to shake once more the hand that portrayed the "Transfiguration." I had the pleasure of inspecting that great work on the occasion of my last visit to the Vatican. Reports have been circulated of your death, sir. But people will believe anything nowadays. It shall be contradicted at once.' Here the Colonel made an entry in his note-book. 'And so you are in partnership with Mr. Yorke?' he added.

'Why, we sails in the same boat, as I mought say,' replied Raphael, who, with the

utmost exertion of his wits, was wholly unable to catch the visitor's drift, or to know whether he was being flattered or insulted. An American newspaper correspondent was a kind of craft which had never until now loomed upon his horizon.

'Thank you,' said the Colonel, completing his entry. 'And now, Mr. Raphael, with your permission, we will proceed to an examination of the Gordoni. This, I presume, will be the article?' And he advanced towards the larger of the two easels as he spoke.

'Hold hard there, mate!' exclaimed Raphael; but he was not able to say more, for at that moment the entrance of two new visitors distracted his attention. The first was a short, stout gentleman, about fifty years of age, with a white waistcoat, and a hollow in his back as he walked. He kept his knees very straight and turned his feet out; and he had emphasised the deep creases of his double chin by a habit of settling that feature back into his neck. His face was ruddy, pompous, and good-humoured, but criss-crossed with many lines, the traces of a lifetime spent amidst the cares and excitements of business. He carried a gold-rimmed double eye-glass in one hand, and began to speak in a full, broad voice as soon as he passed the threshold.

'Well, Stephen, here we are, you see! Three minutes late, but that was unavoidable. Can stop only half an hour, as I have to preside at a meeting in Hammersmith at—— eh!

where is he?' He put up his eye-glasses and stared this way and that in evident discomfiture. 'Er—Raphael, where is your master?'

'I was expecting him back, Sir Montagu,' replied that worthy. 'However, he's not turned up yet. Mayhap we can do without him for a bit.'

'Not in again!' exclaimed Sir Montagu, in a complaining tone. 'Really, this remissness on Stephen's part is annoying—I may say inconsiderate. After engaging to instruct you, my dear—I admit, gratuitously, but still, an engagement is an engagement—his conduct seems positively a slight upon myself!'

These latter words were addressed to the young lady who had followed Sir Montagu Goldsborough into the studio. She was a small, graceful, stylishly-dressed girl, decidedly pretty, but with the expression and manner of a woman of the world. She smiled composedly at her father's appeal, and remarked, as she drew off her gloves:—

'Stephen is not likely to slight you intentionally, papa. As Raphael says, I can go on with my work without him. Let us begin at once.'

'You'll find the palette and brushes set to your hand, miss,' put in Raphael, touching his forelock with a certain dignified deference.

''Pon my word, my dear,' exclaimed the stout baronet, dabbing his forehead with his handkerchief and looking very red, 'I've a good mind to say I won't sit at all this morning. If

Stephen anticipated being away, why couldn't he have sent us word to that effect? I am not accustomed to be made subject to the caprices of any man.'

'Good gracious, papa, what is the use of getting into such a fume?' inquired the young lady, who had by this time established herself at her easel. 'You know he never knew what the time was since he was born. Do you know, Raphael,' she added, 'whether Mr. Yorke had any other engagement this morning?'

'Oh, ay, miss,' returned the old sailor; 'he was to mess with the Duchess of Marylebone at two bells—one o'clock, I would say.'

Goldsborough turned briskly, and his aggrieved manner underwent a softening change.

'Duchess of—what did you say?' he inquired, in a subdued tone.

'Her Grace of Marylebone, papa,' said the daughter, with a slight ironical lifting of her slender eyebrows; 'and *now* will you take your seat, please?'

Sir Montagu Goldsborough put his handkerchief into his pocket with an air of satisfaction and restored good-humour. 'Well, well,' he said, 'we must not be too hard upon Stephen, either. The Duchess of Marylebone, eh! My dear, I consider it very proper of Stephen—a very commendable proceeding on his part, not to permit his devotion to art to interfere with the higher—er—social convenances.' He ascended the throne and seated

himself with dignified complacency in the chair, adding, 'We may as well get on with the portrait without further delay.'

The sitting proceeded accordingly; for Miss Gabrielle Goldsborough had, for four or five months past, been pursuing under Stephen's guidance the art of painting in oils. She was a girl who had a good deal of talent of a general kind, but was sadly in need of some motive or impulse to set her talent in motion. Not long after her acquaintance with Stephen began, however, the persuasion forced itself upon her that it was as an artist that she was destined to find an outlet for those vague yearnings towards the beautiful and the clever which had long since been working in her soul. Yorke, though by no means tolerant of pupils, as a general thing, could not refuse to oversee the artistic education of the daughter of his first discoverer and patron. And having once undertaken the thing, it was characteristic of the man to devote a great deal of energy and earnestness to it; much more, indeed, than the pupil herself had intended to do. At all events, she had made considerable progress, and was surprised at her own diligence. Whether she was inspired by pure love of art to make these exertions, or whether she would continue them only so long as some other stimulus which was not exactly artistic was exercised upon her, are questions which we need not at this moment examine.

Meanwhile, Colonel Sparks, after having

scrutinised the partly-finished portrait of the Gordoni with the eye of a business agent, if not of an art connoisseur, had gone on to take notes of the various other objects of interest in the studio, including the tapestry hangings and the Oriental floor rugs, and not forgetting the marks on the porcelain. In his own way, the Colonel was as thorough a man as Yorke himself. But while thus attentive to his own affairs, he had been careful not to allow what was going forward between the other occupants of the studio entirely to escape him, and he now took advantage of the quiet interval to step forward and make himself agreeable.

'How do you do, Sir Montagu Goldsborough?' he said, in his leisurely tones, bowing with formal courtesy. 'Though personally unknown to you, sir, I have the honour to represent an influential organ of public opinion in the United States, and in its name I beg to assure you that your reputation as one of the leading financiers of the Old World has long been recognised in our business circles. My card, sir—Colonel Sparks, correspondent, and so forth. I am proud to shake hands with you, Sir Montagu,' added the Colonel, pleasantly; 'and I present my compliments to this young lady, whom I take to be your daughter.'

Sir Montagu, though a little startled by this unexpected address, was, upon reflection, flattered by it. Large numbers of Americans came every year to London; many of them

were wealthy persons, and it behoved him, as an alert business man, not to neglect whatever reasonable and respectable opportunities of enlarging and advertising his business connections might come in his way. Accordingly he bent his head in an affable manner towards Colonel Sparks, and bethought himself what polite thing he could say to him.

'I am gratified to meet a gentleman of your nation and—er—profession,' he began. 'America is, I understand, a place of growing importance. War, although a terrible calamity in itself, is indirectly the—er—means of effecting many desirable results. And as for literature—journalism especially—I have always been disposed to regard it with—er, er—with favour!'

'Sir Montagu,' returned the Colonel with gravity, 'you justify the opinion I had been led to form of your capacities. And this young lady,' he inclined himself courteously towards Gabrielle, 'bids fair, in the elegant pursuit she has chosen, to prove herself a worthy daughter of her race. She paints considerably well—she does indeed!'

'Colonel Sparks's flattery is as discriminating as his discrimination is flattering,' said Gabrielle, with ironic intent, for she did not share her father's desire to be on good terms with the great Republic across the ocean. But the Colonel was not to be discouraged.

'I thank you for that observation, Miss Goldsborough,' he said. 'I should be happy

to sit down and have a chat with you and your good father; but I have a press of engagements on hand, and I shall have to postpone seeing Yorke till a future occasion. But the *New York Universe* is always glad to open its columns to facts concerning leaders of London society, Sir Montagu, and if I can wire a line or two about you, it would be esteemed a favour.'

'Colonel Sparks,' replied the baronet, with a gracious smile, 'it shall not be my fault if our acquaintance ceases here. I am giving a small garden-party at my villa at Putney to-morrow afternoon: do me the favour to—er—join us. Four o'clock.'

'I shall be proud to do so, sir,' the Colonel replied, making an entry in his note-book. 'You may count upon me, Sir Montagu, at four o'clock. And now allow me to wish you and this young lady a very good morning. Mr. Raphael, the same to you.'

The Colonel waved his hat and departed. Sir Montagu settled himself comfortably in his chair, and remarked, 'A highly intelligent and agreeable man!'

'Oh, papa!' his daughter exclaimed, protestingly.

'Ambitious, evidently,' continued the father; 'but possessed of a sense—a most comfortable sense—of er—er—social values!'

'Of his own social importance, I should say,' put in Gabrielle.

'My dear, I have noticed with concern

your aptness to jump at conclusions. Colonel Sparks is—er—an officer; and since the United States army is, as I am given to understand, small and select, it follows that an American colonel must be a rare and distinguished individual. Moreover, he seems to be a friend of our friend Stephen Yorke.'

'I wish Mr. Yorke had shown his friendship by being here to entertain his friend.'

'In Stephen's unavoidable absence, that pleasure devolves upon me. And now, my dear, an opportunity serves. I would like to sound you upon a matter of grave—of very grave—moment.'

'Oh, please not, papa! I hate grave moments!'

'Your diffidence, my dear, is maidenly and appropriate. Still, you must bear in mind that you are two-and-twenty ——'

'Twenty, papa dear!' interrupted the young lady, rather pertly.

'And it is my ambition to see you satisfactorily settled in life,' the baronet went on. 'Let me mention, in the first place, that, although I have been many years a widower, I myself may see fit to alter my domestic arrangements—ahem! but not, of course, until you are happily and—er—substantially married. Now, your name has, for some time past, been coupled with Stephen Yorke's. Though not a man of noble lineage, his position as an artist is second to none in the land. I believe you regard him with no un-

favourable eye, and his behaviour towards you ——'

'He is always kind and attentive to me, of course,' interrupted Gabrielle, with somewhat less composure than she had heretofore shown; 'but I don't think he is in the least what you would call a marrying man. He looks so grave and gloomy sometimes, that I have wondered whether he hasn't been doing something very dreadful!'

The baronet was shocked. 'My dear,' he remonstrated, 'your conclusions, based upon —er—a fantastic imagination, are positively alarming. Stephen Yorke is the soul of honour!'

'At all events, you had better leave him to me, papa,' said Gabrielle, uneasily. 'Hark! There he is now—I hear his tread!' She bent over her canvas and painted away diligently.

CHAPTER III.

ARTIST AND PUPIL.

STEPHEN YORKE came into the studio with a hasty step and a somewhat preoccupied manner. He made his apologies briefly, and his answers to the baronet's inquiries as to the health and happiness of the duchess were vague and unsatisfactory. He said something in an undertone to Raphael, as the latter was helping him on with his painting-jacket; and when, at

length, he took up his position behind Gabrielle's chair, she had an obscure feeling that he was not in a particularly congenial humour for instruction.

'Do you think it will be a likeness?' she inquired presently.

'Not if you go on as you are doing now,' replied Stephen, bending his brows together slowly. 'You paint before you look. Tell the truth on canvas as faithfully as you would by word of mouth—that was my plan, and is my advice. Don't flatter your father; he'll be none the better for it. Do you know what Ivo Scott said when he saw this portrait?'

'You have allowed him to see it!' exclaimed Gabrielle, in pretty dismay.

Yorke smiled. 'Keep anything from a diplomatist! He said, "If Miss Goldsborough wants another sitter, recommend me. She lends from her own capital of beauty."'

'Did Mr. Scott really say that?' murmured the young lady, pensively. 'But I do wish he hadn't seen this daub.'

'Why are you afraid of his criticism?' Yorke demanded, coming from behind her chair, and looking down at her.

Gabrielle merely shrugged her shoulders; but Sir Montagu, fancying, perhaps, that Yorke would be the better for a little well-applied stimulus, took upon himself to remark that, 'Possibly my daughter does not care to betray any real or imaginary shortcomings before one

who has paid her so much attention as, it must be confessed, Mr. Ivo Scott has done.'

'Papa! Mr. Scott has done nothing of the kind,' Miss Goldsborough exclaimed; 'he has never even asked me to waltz!'

'Humph! he doesn't dance,' said Stephen, with another smile.

'My dear, as I have already observed, diffidence is maidenly and *occasionally* appropriate,' went on the baronet, blandly; 'but here, in the presence of an old and valued friend, there is no reason for undue reserve. I am a plain, straightforward man; I desire no lord's son for my son-in-law—if you don't want him for a husband! No, no, Stephen, don't leave us,' he added, descending from his seat and following Yorke, who was turning away. 'As a man in possession of my confidence—as a—er—valued friend of my daughter's—you should—er—mediate between us! There are matters more nearly affecting my daughter's happiness than painting her father's portrait, on which your counsel might be desirable.'

'Really, papa, I wish you would stop,' said Gabrielle, in a tone which was low, but by no means devoid of emphasis.

'I shall always be at your service,' Yorke said, with some embarrassment, but looking the baronet straight in the face.

'In that case,' returned the latter, who thought he had said enough to make himself understood, 'in that case, my dear Stephen, the subject may for the present be allowed to drop.

I have an engagement at Hammersmith this afternoon, and——'

'I have an engagement, too,' broke in Stephen, his face lightening up unmistakably. 'I was going to tell you of it. Pauline Gordoni is to leave London in a few days, and she will give me a final sitting this afternoon. She is due here now.'

'Then, papa,' said Gabrielle, quickly, 'I think you and I had better get out of Mr. Yorke's way.' She had already shut up her box of painting materials, and now began to draw on her gloves.

But the baronet did not seem to be in a hurry to depart. The mention of the Gordoni's name had produced a manifest impression on him. He pulled down his waistcoat, pulled up his collar, and cleared his throat, and altogether bore himself as a man not averse to making a favourable figure before somebody. Yorke, who was assisting Raphael to remove Gabrielle's easel, and to place in position that which supported the portrait of Gordoni, did not perceive this behaviour; but it was not lost upon Miss Goldsborough, and it occasioned her evident irritation. 'I am quite ready, papa,' she said; 'are you waiting for the Hammersmith meeting to come to you?'

'My dear,' he replied, 'I must really ask you to permit me to judge of my obligations. I am not tied down to minutes in this case; and, besides, our carriage has not yet been announced.'

At this juncture, however, there was a loud ring at the door-bell; and Raphael, after due investigation, returned with the double announcement that Sir Montagu's carriage was waiting, and that Pauline Gordoni had arrived.

Pauline immediately appeared in the doorway. The famous prima donna was at this period at the acme of her beauty and renown. She was tall and superb in figure, but with all the vivacity and grace of a smaller woman. Her neck was unusually long, and by its movements she was able to express a variety of emotion; nature, as well as the habit of the stage, had invested her attitudes and gestures with a certain large and picturesque significance, so that she seemed to speak at all points. Her rich black dress, with the white camellia over the left breast, and the broad gold necklace and watch-guard, suited admirably the warm paleness of her complexion, her dark, sparkling eyes, and heavy brown hair. Her features were noble and sensitive, and her whole aspect spirited, fresh, and fascinating.

She came forward, with a broad smile, and gave Stephen both her hands. 'Am I again late?' she demanded, in a mellow voice. Then she caught sight of Gabrielle and the baronet standing together near the easel, and added, in an undertone, while her smile vanished, 'or, for once, too soon?'

'You are always in season,' said Stephen, openly and cordially.

Pauline turned from him and inclined her

head politely to the other guests. 'Sir Montagu,' she murmured, 'this is an unexpected delight. Miss Goldsborough . . . what a charming costume!'

'That from you is indeed a compliment,' the young lady replied, crisply.

'Can it be true that our charming Gordoni contemplates deserting us?' inquired Sir Montagu, with elaborate expressiveness.

'We poor slaves of managers have no wills of our own,' the prima donna replied; 'and experience teaches that the best way to keep your regard is to give you every now and then a chance to forget us.'

'A man must outlive threescore years and ten before he could forget the Gordoni!' returned Sir Montagu, in a most sentimental tone.

Pauline laughed rather mischievously. 'And how many years, then,' she inquired, 'may I hope to survive in Sir Montagu's recollection?' Then, seeing that the poor baronet was really hurt by the innuendo, she put out her hand to him and added kindly, 'Long before you can plead that excuse, you know, I shall have lost whatever might have entitled me to your remembrance.'

While this conversation was going forward, Gabrielle had walked up to Yorke, who was arranging the lounge on which Pauline was to sit. She had something on her mind, but did not seem to know exactly how to dispose of it. She waited in hopes that Yorke would speak to her; but at length, perceiving that he was pre-

occupied with what he was doing, and even appeared to be unaware of her presence, she said briskly :—

'By the way, Mr. Yorke ——'

'Yes?' he said, facing her, with his large gaze.

'What my father was saying to you just now,' she went on, with signs of embarrassment, 'he did not mean anything particular by it, you know ; and I want you to promise me that you won't think anything more of it—will you?'

'To be sure—just as you like!' the artist answered, with simplicity. After a moment he turned again and went on with his arrangements. Gabrielle coloured, and seemed on the point of saying something sharp ; but, controlling herself, she walked slowly towards the door, where she paused, and, in a penetrating tone, asked :—

'Shall I order the carriage to be sent away again, papa?'

Sir Montagu had Pauline's hand in his, and was apparently in the midst of some tender compliment, to which she was listening with a smile half amused, half mischievous. At the sound of Gabrielle's voice she drew away her hand, and assumed an arch expression of consternation.

'Dear me, Sir Montagu, see how thoughtless and selfish I am!' she exclaimed ; 'keeping you from public duties simply for my own gratification. You will forgive me this time,

will you not? and I promise faithfully it shall never happen again.'

'It may be selfishness to you, but it is life to me,' returned the stout baronet, reddening at the exuberance of his own brilliancy. 'However,' he continued, with a sigh, 'I suppose that stupid affair at Hammersmith must be attended to. I shall see you at Putney to-morrow afternoon, of course? Yes, we shall all meet there. And possibly—possibly, my charming friend,' he went on, lowering his voice, 'I may seek a private interview at an earlier hour; will you grant it?'

'Why, as to that, if it's anything in the way of business, you will be sure to find me ready for you,' was Pauline's answer, accompanied by an unexpected and rather disconcerting laugh. The baronet did not know quite what to make of it; but prudently concluding that it must, in some way, indicate something favourable to himself, he laughed ostentatiously in return, bent over her hand, and then walked promptly to the door, calling out importantly, 'Well, good-bye—good-bye! Duty calls me, and I'm off! Good-bye, Yorke—to-morrow at four o'clock. Come, Gabrielle, my dear, we mustn't keep our carriage waiting any longer! Farewell everybody. Come along!'

'Now, Ralph!' said Yorke, when the door had closed behind them, 'whoever comes here this afternoon, I'm not at home. Do you understand?'

'Ay, ay, sir, surely,' replied the old seaman, with a knowing wag of his head. He discreetly retired into the ante-room, and left the singer and the painter alone.

CHAPTER IV.

THE PRIMA DONNA.

PAULINE had thrown herself upon the lounge, and pressed her fingers over her eyes, as if she had been offended by an ugly vision. In a few moments she sat erect, and, with her hands clasped in her lap, gazed searchingly at Stephen.

'Was this situation of your own devising?' she demanded, at length.

'I forgot to tell them not to come,' Stephen replied, placing himself. 'The engagement with them is a regular one: yours is irregular. However, it is all right now. Put yourself in position.'

'You are quite sure it is all right?' demanded Pauline again, in a remarkably subdued tone.

'Why not?' returned Stephen, quietly, mixing the colours on his palette.

'Nothing: except that I'm going home!' said the prima donna, springing to her feet, and beginning to tie on her hat with great precipitation.

'Are you not at home here?' asked the

painter, laying down his palette and advancing towards her with his hands in his coat pockets.

'I have no home—you are kind to remind me of that,' she said, firing an angry glance at him. 'But I am at home here less than anywhere!'

'Call it your prison, then; for you will not get out at present.'

'Who will prevent me?' inquired Pauline, drawing herself up formidably.

'I will, if it comes to that,' Stephen answered, composedly; 'but I have hopes that you will prevent yourself. Why, what's the matter?'

'You think, then, that I will condescend to play at hide-and-seek with that trumpery little banker's daughter, do you?' exclaimed Pauline, making a gesture with her flexible hands as if she were snapping that young lady in twain. 'You mistake me, sir! I won't be taken as an alternative for any woman in England! You think you may slight me and insult me because I belong to the stage——What! You laugh at me! Oh, Stephen!'

'Yes, I laugh because I am angry,' said Yorke, coming forward and standing close to her. 'The stage has hurt you more than I thought, since you can assign me motives that you know are false. I believed till now that you had a dignity of womanhood that would keep you from stooping to these silly spites and —not jealousy—you don't feel that!—vanity!

Shall I show you what I saw in you just now? Come here!'

He took her by the arm and led her up to the picture on the easel. Then, resuming his palette and brushes, he laid in a few touches of light and shadow about the eyes and mouth. The effect was appalling. The beautiful, spirited face had suddenly become mean and malignant. All nobility, all generosity, almost all refinement, seemed to have departed.

'Do you wish it to stand so?' said Yorke, drawing back.

Pauline gazed at the altered portrait in silence. At last, with a slight shiver of the shoulders, she turned from it, and met the look that Yorke was bending over her. He saw that her lovely eyes were wet with tears.

'You always conquer me, Stephen,' she said, with a faint smile. 'I seem to change at your will just as that painted canvas does. But do not show me what I am: show me what I ought to be—what you wish me to be—and help me to become so. I am very sorry I was cross. Forgive me!'

Music of instruments could not reproduce the changing melody of her tones in speaking these sentences. They found their way into Yorke's heart, as they had often done before. He drew in a long breath, and averted his eyes.

'Your power is greater than mine,' he said. 'I only paint the emotion, but you can produce it. You may do deadly mischief with your

voice, Pauline; or you may make men happy if you will.'

'I should like to think I could make you happy,' she murmured, stealing her hand into his. 'It is absurd for us to quarrel, when we know all the time that no brother and sister could care for each other more than we do. I am sure my own brother was never so much to me as you have been, Stephen.'

'You have a brother, then?' said Yorke, rousing himself, as it were, from a trance, and beginning to paint out the deforming touches from the portrait. 'What of him?'

'Only that he and I are nephew and niece of old Sir Percy Gordon of Cedarhurst. When I insisted upon going on the stage, uncle Percy cut me off with a shilling, and said he would do the same by my brother if he had anything more to do with me.'

'And your brother agreed, did he?'

'Of course; I put it out of his power to refuse by myself refusing to have anything more to do with him. We had never been much together—he at school and college, I at home: I don't think he missed me much; and what I missed was rather my ideal of a brother than my brother himself.'

'I have heard some rumour of this before,' muttered Stephen, between the touches of his brush. 'So you gave up fifteen thousand a year for the sake of being a singer; and he took thirty thousand a year on condition of giving

up you? You had quite the best of the bargain?'

'Yes, if you will be friends with me, and not scold me any more,' said the prima donna, with an enchanting side glance at him. 'Poor boy, you have never had a sister: you don't know what a trouble they are.'

'How do you know what—troubles I have had?' Stephen inquired, still bending to his canvas.

Something in his tone caught the quick ear of the singer; the smile which had begun to dimple round her mouth died away, and she regarded him with a stealthy glance. There was a pause of some duration.

'You do not think me worthy of your confidence,' she said, at length, in a low voice. 'I am your model, not your friend.'

'My confidence would be no favour, Heaven knows! but it is a secret that would create a bond between us: I have no right to force it upon you. No other woman has ever heard me speak of it; and only one man.'

While Stephen was speaking thus, he continued painting with outward composure; but the prima donna felt, rather than heard or saw, that he was deeply moved. Great natures apprehend each other in ways which lesser folks do not understand. Presently Stephen felt upon his shoulder a touch as light as falling snow; but it seemed to lay warm hold upon his heart. He looked up, and Pauline said simply:—

'Tell me!'

He laid down his brushes, and rose to his feet. From the right wall of the studio depended a heavy curtain, which might have been supposed to cover a window. Stephen went up to this curtain and drew it aside. It revealed the portrait of an extremely lovely girl, about eighteen years of age.

'That is my sister,' said he.

Pauline, who had been seated on the arm of his chair, came forward slowly, and stopped within a few paces of the portrait, at which she gazed in silence.

'She was my only sister,' Stephen went on; 'years younger than myself, as you see. I was able to give her a better education than I had had. A young lady at the same school with her became so fond of her, that, after our father's death, she invited her to live with her at their home in Jersey. As I was travelling abroad at the time, it seemed a fortunate arrangement. Well, when I ended my travels, I went to Jersey, meaning to take her with me finally to London.'

Here he paused abruptly. Pauline, who was standing with her hands hanging clasped, moved them a little, and her bosom heaved; but she said nothing.

'She was gone,' said Stephen, bringing out the words with difficulty.

'Stephen ——' whispered Pauline.

He went on, in a harder tone: 'She had been seen on board the Southampton packet; a man, a—gentleman—was seen beside her.

No evidence of her marriage can be found.' He paused again, with his face averted. 'A month ago I passed her in Piccadilly. She was in an open carriage.'

'Did she recognise you?'

'She blushed, and turned away. I have not seen her since.'

'It may not be as wretched as you think,' said Pauline, in almost a pleading tone. 'Have you made all inquiries ——'

Stephen gave a dreary smile. 'I did what I could. But if she were honest, she would not shun me. I am the fashionable portrait-painter. My doings are noted—my house is well known. She would have no difficulty in finding me.'

Pauline was silent, save that her sympathy seemed to speak.

'This misery, which I ought to have prevented, has had its effect on me, as you may suppose. I take the blame to myself. But I am waiting to find that man,' added the artist, with a quietly terrible look, that made Pauline inwardly shudder. 'I feel that we shall meet!'

'No, no!' she said, with an indrawing of the breath. She walked quickly to the curtain, and drew it with impulsive energy across the portrait once more. Yorke understood the significance of the act; but he shook his head.

'I cannot forget her, Pauline.'

'Remember your love for her, and forget the rest. Your life must not be marred. You are in the prime of your life and fame, Stephen.'

'I am on the boundary between youth and age. Every day I find myself more alone. When you leave me I shall be quite alone.' As they instinctively turned towards one another, each felt, perhaps, that a great moment was at hand for both of them. Their hands met. 'How can we part?' said Stephen. 'What can part us?'

There was a moment of silence, which might have been followed by anything. The sharp metallic jingle of the door-bell jarred upon their nerves like something poisonous. It was followed by a sound of voices in the ante-room—Raphael's gruff voice, and another. Then the door opened, and a well-dressed, middle-aged man, with a clever, self-possessed face, and a figure of medium height, entered the studio. His eyes, which were set remarkably far apart, and which he habitually kept half-closed, took in the situation at a glance. He doffed his hat and bowed low.

'My dear Stephen,' he said, laughingly, 'tell this Cerberus of yours to stop biting me! He won't believe that I come here by appointment. *Diva illustrissima*,' he went on, appealing to Pauline, 'pray intercede for me!' He came forward, still laughing good-humouredly and holding out his hand. To himself he was saying, 'I'm *de trop*, that's evident: but—just in time!'

CHAPTER V.

DIPLOMATIC SERVICE.

STEPHEN and Pauline had drawn a little apart at the entrance of the new comer; but it was manifest, upon the former's countenance at least, that the interruption was not over and above welcome. The prima donna said, after a moment, 'What a clever man you are, Mr. Scott! You always know the dramatic touch necessary to make a situation complete. Mr. Yorke and I have just been trying a duet, and neither of us knew how to finish it.'

'Well, Ivo,' said Stephen, taking the other's hand rather unenthusiastically, 'what is the news with you?'

'What news?' returned the Honourable Ivo cheerfully, 'why—glorious news! disastrous news!'

'Come, no paradoxes, Mr. Scott,' said the prima donna, taking up her bonnet; 'what is it?'

'Her Majesty has been graciously pleased to appoint me First Secretary of Legation to Washington. I sail next week.'

'So soon, Ivo?' said Yorke more cordially

'Oh, as to that, I've been expecting the appointment for the last three months.'

'And the disaster?' Pauline inquired.

'Can you ask?' exclaimed Scott, romantically.

'I have asked,' she replied, in the most matter-of-fact way possible.

'Well, then, separation from you!'

'Leave compliments to Sir Montagu Goldsborough, who understands how to make them,' answered the prima donna; then, noticing that Yorke had walked to another part of the studio, she continued, with a grave assumption of being confidential, 'But don't you know that I have been offered a splendid engagement in the United States?'

'Shall you accept?' demanded Scott, a sparkle showing itself beneath his drooping eyelids.

Pauline gave him one of those glances, full of tantalising, non-committal suggestiveness, that no man under ninety ever sustained with composure, and said slowly:—

'I am . . . undecided!'

Then she turned away and left him. The diplomatist rubbed his chin and looked at his watch.

'Well, Yorke,' he said; 'half-past four! I'm punctual. My victoria is at the door.'

Yorke, who was staring out of the window, with his hands in his coat-pockets, said abstractedly, 'So I see!' but he did not appear to be at all impressed by the spectacle.

'So late as that?' exclaimed Pauline, 'and my party at Campden Hill at five! Please, Mr. Yorke, send for a hansom!'

'Pray honour my carriage by making

use of it,' Scott said, picking up her gloves from the lounge and presenting them to her. 'This fellow has forgotten his appointment with me, as a matter of course, and he won't be ready for half-an-hour.'

'Thanks very much; then I will,' she answered. Stephen came up, and she gave him her hand. 'Good-bye,' she said; 'you will be in your stall to-night?'

'Your last appearance! Of course!' Stephen replied.

'*Au revoir*, Mr. First Secretary,' she added, relinquishing her other hand to him, the tips of whose fingers he kissed chivalrously; 'we meet in Washington—perhaps!'

Yorke accompanied her to the door, and she whispered in his ear:—

'Come and speak to me, to-night, after the second act!'

When she was gone, Scott threw himself into a chair, lighted a cigarette, and offered Yorke his cigarette-case. 'So,' said he, 'you've forgotten your engagement.'

'Which?' returned Yorke, absently.

'Dinner at the Trafalgar.'

'That was for ——'

'Six o'clock to-day.'

'You mentioned Thursday.'

'Exactly—to-day!'

'My dear Ivo,' began Yorke, abashed and reddening, I ——'

'Tut, tut!' interrupted the other, good-naturedly, 'you forgot; there's no harm done.

But what is the matter with you, man? You've been in a brown study ever since I got here. 'Are you starving? or have you over-eaten yourself?'

Yorke considered awhile, and then said gravely:—

'I'm thinking of . . . marrying.'

'Oh, by all means!' replied the diplomatist, briskly. 'Keep on!'

'Keep on?'

'Thinking of it!' said Scott, with a dry laugh.

Yorke remained grave. 'I want to marry,' repeated he.

'You're ambitious!' returned Scott, knocking the ashes off his cigarette. 'Luckily,' he added, glancing up, 'you're not in love.'

'But I am!'

'Then accept my profoundest . . . astonishment! Why, my dear fellow, have you any notion what you are about? Matrimony, at our time of life, is always risky. We know too well what we surrender and too little what we gain. However, something depends upon the other party. Who is she?'

'Guess!'

'Hum! Miss Goldsborough?'

'A jealous guess, Ivo!'

'You do me too much honour! Miss Goldsborough and I stand on a footing of armed neutrality. Everybody couples her name with yours.'

'She is not the lady,' said Yorke, coldly.

'Then I give it up.'

Yorke pointed over his shoulder to the canvas on the easel. 'There's her portrait,' said he.

'Not—not Gordoni!' said the other, jumping to his feet as though electrified by mere surprise. But Yorke only nodded, and puffed at his cigarette complacently.

'Stephen Yorke marry Pauline Gordoni?' persisted the diplomatist, incredulously.

'To-morrow, if she'll have me.'

'It can't be done;' said Scott, tossing away his cigarette in apparent irritation.

Yorke looked round at him slowly. 'Why not?'

'Oh, I'm not going to argue the matter with you, Stephen,' his friend said, changing his tone and speaking with a sort of sad gravity. 'For that matter the arguments are only too trite—they are in everybody's mouth. Are you willing to go shares with the public in your wife? Do you wish always to be spoken of in the genitive case? Do you imagine that a great singer like Pauline Gordoni can give up the stage for a husband and housekeeping? I won't go more particularly into the matter, for fear of offending you. Suffice it to say, that you would spoil your career and hers into the bargain.'

'You don't make any allowance, so far as I can see, for the fact that love is the strongest passion of our nature,' observed Stephen.

'I deny your "fact" in the first place,' Scott retorted, 'and in the second place, I must decline to believe that you're in love, or she either. You are infatuated for the moment, and I don't blame you for it; Gordoni is in love with—herself in her *rôles*, perhaps, and the world's applause! Now if it were Miss Goldsborough, I could see some reason in it.'

'I am certainly not in love with Miss Goldsborough,' said Yorke, with a smile.

'Who asks you to be? Your marriage with her would be not only prudent, but a simple act of justice. Her father has been deucedly kind to you, and I have reason to believe that he expects some day to call you his son-in-law. Wealth is of course no object to you—lucky dog!—though the old gentleman's half-million or so would furnish a substantial background for your pictures. As for the young lady, she is pretty, and just enough of the dilettante to appreciate your art without disturbing it.'

'Upon my word, Ivo,' said Yorke, with a short laugh, 'I had no idea you could be so eloquent. Well, I'm no match for you in argument, you may be right from your point of view, as I am from mine. Let us drop the subject. If you will excuse me, I'll go inside and change my coat.'

'Your coat, by all means; your condition—never!' returned Ivo, with a sprightliness which was perhaps not altogether genuine. In

fact, the discussion had disturbed him not a little. As he turned, his ever-observant eyes caught the portrait upon the wall, for Pauline, in replacing the curtain, had only half hidden the canvas.

'Hullo, Stephen,' he exclaimed, 'what's this?' His attention had been arrested, not only by the beauty of the face, but by a persuasion which immediately took possession of him that he had, somewhere, and not long ago, seen the original of it. 'Whose is it?' he asked.

'I thought you knew it,' said the artist, frowning. 'At all events you know the story—so far as it has gone! My sister. Pshaw! draw the curtain. I wish to God I could meet the man, and give the story its end!'

When Scott was left alone, he did not draw the curtain, but, on the contrary, continued to scrutinise the portrait, with an expression on his face half puzzled, half expectant.

'*That* Stephen's sister!' he muttered to himself more than once. 'And yet I can swear I have seen her before, here in London, and less than a month since. Let me think! There was somebody with her; some fellow whose name I know . . . bother it! if I could only recollect who he was . . . hum! now who on earth could he have been?'

'Mr. Percy Gordon!' said the voice of Raphael, at the door, ushering in that gentleman.

A light of intelligence gleamed for an instant in the Honourable Ivo's eyes. He drew the curtain sharply. 'The answer, by Jove!' muttered he.

He turned leisurely, and by the time he was face to face with the young *attaché* (such was Mr. Gordon's present rank in the diplomatic service) his expression had fully regained its habitual affable inscrutability.

'Ha? Percy,' he said, carelessly. 'Anything new?'

'Er—well, nothing of any public importance,' replied Gordon, in the hesitating and drawling tone that appears to be natural to handsome young university graduates of aristocratic descent, like himself.

'And what, my young friend, is of so much private importance as to induce you, the laziest man in the service, to take the rather extraordinary step of following me all the way from Whitehall to Stephen Yorke's studio?'

'By-the-by,' said Gordon, looking round, 'is Mr. Yorke in?'

'In his dressing-room. Have you ever met him?'

'Er—no,' answered Gordon, with reserve. 'I've heard of him.'

'Hum! so have a good many people. Well, now, what is it you want?'

'Why, the fact is, I came to know whether you could—er—manage to let me have three days' leave of absence?'

'The deuce!' said Scott, putting on a serious aspect. 'My dear Percy, although zeal in diplomacy is always to be deprecated, it doesn't follow that one ought not to *seem* busy.'

'Well, the fact is,' hesitated Gordon, 'I've just heard that my uncle, Sir Percy Gordon, you know, has been thrown from his horse, and —er—is not expected to live. And I'm heir to the title, don't you know.'

'Yes—and the land?'

'Well, it's not entailed, and might be left elsewhere.'

'Then go, by all means, and good luck to you! Oh, by the way, I saw in the *Morning Post* that you are going to be married. I congratulate you. Charming girl—Lady Cicely!' Scott was watching the young *attaché's* face closely.

'Er—thanks! Yes, Lady Cicely is a charming girl,' assented Gordon, with some awkwardness. 'My uncle desires the match, don't you know, but . . . the date isn't fixed, I believe.'

'Well, well, you're a lucky fellow. You haven't seen your sister's portrait, I suppose?' continued Scott, in an accidental sort of way.

'Er—where?' inquired Gordon, putting up an eyeglass.

'Here, of course,' replied the other, laying his hand on his shoulder and leading him to the easel.

'Ah! well, it's deuced like her,' remarked the *attaché*, dropping his glass, after a moment,

and turning his back on the portrait. 'Only I don't understand much about pictures, and—er —I haven't spoken to my sister for years—ever since she hopped over the traces and went on the stage, don't you know. It wasn't likely, was it?'

Scott chuckled a little to himself, following with his eyes the slight and graceful figure of the younger man, as he lounged down the studio. 'Delightful *naïveté*!' he muttered below his breath, 'but I think I can find a place where the skin is tender! I say, Percy, my boy,' he continued aloud, there's one other thing here you ought to look at, while you're in the way of it.' He beckoned him to the corner of the room where the veiled picture hung. Gordon approached listlessly.

'Something else in the artistic line?' he inquired.

'I fancy it may interest you, outside of that,' Scott observed, taking hold of the curtain, but delaying to withdraw it. 'It's a very lovely face: such a one as any young fellow whose heart was not set exclusively upon politics and diplomacy (as I half believe yours is), would commit an indiscretion for. Possibly you may have seen the face itself—unless Lady Cicely Pope's has made you blind to every other woman's. But let me have your candid opinion upon it?'

He snatched the curtain aside.

The effect upon Gordon was undeniable. His lounging air fell from him like a garment;

there was a quick, suppressed lifting of the chest and shoulders; colour came to his cheeks; and, in changing his hat from one hand to another, he dropped his gloves. All this Scott observed with a curious smile of mingled pain, contempt, and triumph. It was the confirmation of his suspicions: it was an unlooked-for stroke of destiny on his side: but it might lead to grave and even perilous complications. However, the Honourable Ivo Scott was to some extent a fatalist.

'I thought she would fetch you, my young ascetic,' he murmured, keeping his eyes upon Gordon's face, and smiling slightly. 'She does credit to your taste. That is, you may be surprised to hear, the sister of Mr. Stephen Yorke, the gentleman under whose very roof you are now standing. He'll be out directly.'

'If you sanction my leave,' said Gordon, pulling himself together and, for once, abandoning his hesitating manner in so doing, 'I think I'll take the night express; in fact, I have some packing to do; I'll be off at once.'

'I think you'd better,' returned Scott, significantly. Indeed, it was to the latter's interest to avoid the possible discovery on Yorke's part that Gordon was the betrayer of his sister. Should any outbreak occur, it would affect Pauline almost as much as Percy. At this moment, however, Yorke came in.

'I'm ready, Ivo,' he said. Then, seeing a stranger, he paused, and looked from one to the other inquiringly.

'Confound the boy!' muttered Scott to himself, 'why couldn't he look sharp and get out of the way? Oh, Stephen, old fellow,' he added aloud, 'let me introduce Percy Gordon, brother of our friend Pauline.'

Yorke at first bowed coldly; but the next moment, from another impulse, he advanced and held out his hand.

'As your sister's brother,' he said, 'I am glad to see you, Mr. Gordon. Welcome to my studio.'

They shook hands. Scott turned away, with a shrug of his shoulders and an ironic grimace. 'Blessed ignorance! He has met his man at last,' thought he, as he took out a fresh cigarette and struck a light.

'The carriage is alongside, sir,' said Raphael, putting his grizzled beard in at the door.

Yorke motioned courteously to Gordon to precede him out of the room. Scott, before following them, stepped round in front of Pauline's portrait, and gazed at it for a few moments fixedly. Then he put his hat on his head, and pulled it down over his brows with a sort of emphasis.

'Fate is on my side, whatever happens,' he said, with a certain reluctant exultation. 'If Pauline won't listen to other arguments, I shall always have this in reserve, and it must conquer! No need for Stephen to know—she will be as anxious to keep him in ignorance as Percy or I can be. Poor old Stephen . . . I don't like to go against him . . . but it will

be better for him too. I always said they ought not to marry; and now, whether I say it or no, they *can't* marry!'

Having thus delivered himself, the diplomatic fatalist kissed the tips of his fingers to the portrait, and walked briskly out of the studio.

CHAPTER VI.

GOLD AND ROSES.

PAULINE GORDONI had a pretty little house on Campden Hill, built in the new old style of red brick, with square bow windows, stained glass lattices and door-lights, fifteenth-century fireplaces, polished floors, and blue china. Her morning room, where she received early visitors and transacted business, was the freshest-looking and most comfortable little retreat imaginable; there was always an odour of flowers in it; the chairs and lounges were low, soft, and luxurious; there was a piano, made to her order by Erard, of rosewood and ivory, and her monogram on the sounding-board. In the window hung a huge brass birdcage, containing two scarlet-crested cardinal birds, which sang as if in emulation of the prima donna herself A magnificent English tom cat, of the largest size and most unexceptionable manners, likewise honoured this room with his presence, and seemed to concentrate and typify all the comfortableness of it within his own sleek-sided

plumpness. It was a room where Hecate herself might have forgotten to be miserable.

Nevertheless, when the mistress of this enchanting abode made her appearance in it, on the morning after the events which have been narrated, her beautiful features wore an expression of anxiety and restlessness. She was dressed in a morning robe of a dull gold hue, which flowed in long lines from shoulder to hem, artfully revealing while it seemed to disguise the contour of her noble figure. It was softened at the throat and wrists with delicate lace; and small embroidered Turkish slippers peeped from beneath its pleated front. Pauline's hair was wound round the top of her head in a great dark coil, and was without any ornament other than its own rich lustre.

The prima donna sank down in a chair beside the table, stretched out first one white arm and then the other, and yawned with all the sincerity of solitude. After this, she sat for a while with her elbows on the arms of her chair, the tips of her fingers pressed against her temples, and her eyes roving on vacancy. At length she heaved a long sigh, sat erect, and, reaching across the table, touched a little silver bell.

'Annette,' she said sharply to the maid who appeared, 'why have you not brought my coffee and cigarettes?'

'Mademoiselle,' answered Annette, with calm submission, 'I am bringing them at this moment.' And, as she finished speaking, she

set down the little tray with its contents by her mistress's side.

'How often must I tell you, Annette,' said the prima donna, severely, 'that you are not to make the coffee until I give you the order?' This coffee has been standing all the morning; it has been warmed over; it is not fit to drink! Take it away, and make some fresh.'

'Yes, mademoiselle,' replied Annette, calmly taking up the tray again.

'Stop! Did I tell you to carry off the cigarettes as well? Bring the tray back. Good Heavens, child! have you lost your head? or your heart, which? I can bear anything but stupidity. No, I will not have any fresh coffee made. I shall drink this, and if it makes me ill, it will be your fault. Has nothing come for me this morning? No letters—nothing?'

'Several things are waiting outside for mademoiselle.'

'Do you wish to drive me mad because you see I have a headache? Go and get them without another word! Stop! What is there?'

'There is a square packet done up in white paper: it feels heavy ——'

'Did I ask you how it felt? What else?'

'Then there are letters ——'

'Annette,' interposed the prima donna, with terrible severity, 'be careful not to trifle with me any more. You see that I am not in a mood for it this morning. Do you know, child,' she added, in glorious contralto tones, 'that it is easier for me to kill you than to say

that I will do so? and yet you dare to mention letters, when you know that letters come every morning! What is there that has never come until now?'

'A bouquet, mademoiselle ——

'A bouquet! Well—but now, take care! What sort of a bouquet? Is it made up on wires, of half a dozen different colours, and surrounded with a piece of glazed white paper with a lace border? Think before you speak, Annette!'

'Pardon, mademoiselle, but this bouquet is not in the least of that kind. There is no lace paper, and the colours are only two. The flowers are as if they had been plucked out of the garden without trimming; the stems are long and quite rough; one can see the leaves upon them. But, for the rest, there are a great many, and they smell very sweet.'

'You are beginning to be sensible, Annette,' observed Mademoiselle Gordoni, leaning forward, with colour in her cheeks and a sparkle in her eye. 'After all, perhaps I may have been a little harsh with you. But these flowers —of what kinds are they?'

'Of one kind only, mademoiselle; they are all roses.'

'All roses,' repeated Pauline, softly: 'and of two colours: and gathered with untrimmed stems and leaves: and smelling very sweet. . . . Why, what is the matter, Annette? are you crying?'

'Oh no, mademoiselle,' said the young

person; 'only,' she added, drying her eyes, 'mademoiselle said those words so—so beautifully—and—a little while before mademoiselle —was so stern!'

This spontaneous homage to the matchless music of her voice made the prima donna smile. 'You are a good child, Annette,' she said, 'and I will not be cross with you any more. There—go and bring me the flowers. Stop! tell me first . . . how did they come here?'

'A very strange old man brought them, mademoiselle. He had a very large grey beard, and his clothes were dark blue and not in the least in the mode. He spoke in a big hoarse voice like this—"Miss—them—flowers —is from ——"'

Pauline put up her hand, with a lovely smile. 'Hush—yes—you needn't tell me whom he said they were from; you imitate his voice so well that I even know what he said. Now run and get them this moment—quick!'

Annette ran accordingly, the ribbons of her cap fluttering behind her. She was not gone ten seconds; nevertheless, when she returned, her mistress met her in the middle of the room and received the flowers in both her hands. The singer buried her face in them; and when she raised it again, it was as rosy as the flowers themselves. She returned to her chair and reseated herself, with a luxurious sigh.

It was a great cluster of white and pink roses, over a foot broad, and so arranged that

at a distance they had the appearance of a single gigantic flower, white at the circumference, and gradually growing pinker towards the centre, which was occupied by a solitary inimitable moss-rose. The whole sphere of flowers blushed and glowed like a fragrant living creature, fresh from nature's nursery. Beautiful as they were, however, they symbolised to Pauline's mind something rarer and more beautiful still.

'You may leave me now, Annette,' she said. 'Take the tray with you; and you may as well put those other things you mentioned down here, so that I may look at them when I am ready. If anyone calls, be sure you let me know who it is before admitting him.'

When the prima donna was left alone, she behaved like a very idle young woman. All she did was to sit with the roses in her lap, touching their petals caressingly with her white finger-tips, examining each flower separately, smelling each of them, laying her warm cheek against their cool softness; until at last, grown bolder, she stooped down and touched the central rose with her lips. She raised her head, with a low, shy laugh.

'Not all the Ivo Scotts and Colonel Sparkses in the world shall keep us apart or interrupt us after to-day,' she thought. 'What a weary life that all seems, now! Did I ever care for it? What a stupid, disgusting creature I must have been!'

Still holding the bouquet in her left hand,

she arose and went to the piano, where she struck a few happy chords, accompanying them with inarticulate tones, the pure expression of the emotion that does not lend itself to words. In the midst she paused, and said to herself, 'Perhaps, before long, I shall be singing only to one man instead of to a thousand. Well, there will not be much difference. Did I not sing to him alone among the thousand last night? And is not he the greater audience of the two?'

With a light step she came back to her chair, and having deposited the bouquet securely on her knees, she proceeded to look over her letters. Three of them were from Ivo Scott, Colonel Sparks, and Sir Montagu Goldsborough respectively, each requesting an interview on that morning. She put them down, with a rather mischievous smile.

The white paper packet next attracted her attention. It proved to contain a necklace and ear-rings of superb opals, with a card intimating that they were 'A tiny tribute of admiration to Pauline Gordoni from the Duke and Duchess of Marylebone, in recognition of her private virtues and public talents.' 'Kind old souls!' murmured the singer. 'And what exquisite stones! But—bless their hearts!—what are stones compared with roses?'

A few minutes later Sir Montagu Goldsborough was announced, and admitted.

The robust little baronet was redolent of courtliness and complacency, though underneath these dapper externals might have been

discerned a comic but very sincere solemnity, due to the fact that he looked forward to taking a step of importance to himself, and therefore to society and the world at large. He had on hand, and proceeded to disembarrass himself of, a number of sprightly and euphonious phrases relative to Pauline's personal charms and virtues, and to his own lively and appreciative recognition of them. From thence he launched forth into what he conceived to be topics of general interest or significance; and so by degrees he ambled confidently round to the point at which he had all along been consciously aiming.

'In short, my dear,' he observed, drawing his chair nearer, and holding up for his fair interlocutor's contemplation a short and well-formed forefinger, as a sort of concrete nucleus of the valuable truths he was about to unfold, 'what you require is an adviser—one whom you may trust with your name, your life, and —er—er—your property.'

'But, dear Sir Montagu,' interposed Pauline, 'I already possess that indispensable requisite.'

The baronet was somewhat taken aback by this announcement. 'Eh? dear me! You do? Pray, who may he be?' he inquired.

'Who?' repeated the lady, with an arch expression; 'Why, you silly man, yourself, of course! My property is in your bank, my name is on your books, and as for my life, I believe you would do anything with it—except take it.'

'I apprehend,' said Sir Montagu, after a pause, 'that I have failed in rendering the full extent of my meaning entirely—er—intelligible to you.'

'If you mean that I'm not half grateful enough to you, I dare say it's true,' continued Pauline, innocently; 'but I know how good you are.'

'My goodness, charming Gordoni, is only of value in my eyes in so far as it may incline you to entertain a proposal which I am now about to lay at your feet.'

'I shall, perhaps, be better able to come to a decision upon it, dear Sir Montagu, if you would contrive to keep it upon the level of my understanding.'

'Ha, ha! Capital! Very good, upon my word! But—shall we be serious for one moment? The offer which I bring you is—er—er—is that of a hand and heart!' The baronet rose as he spoke, and placed the former object over the place occupied by the latter.

Pauline leaned back in her chair, with an air of disappointment; and it was in an aggrieved tone that she replied, 'Really, Sir Montagu, there is nothing so very serious in that! I am accustomed to such offers almost daily. However, anything that you are sponsor for is entitled to my respectful consideration. Whose hand and heart are they?'

'Can you ask?' exclaimed the baronet, with an intensely explanatory smile. But Pauline remained obdurately unintelligent.

'Surely,' she protested, 'if a man wants to marry me, I may venture to ask his name.'

'Pauline!' cried the baronet, driven to cast aside all circumlocution, and dropping, not without prejudice to his equilibrium and comfort, on one knee, 'are you really unaware of the—hum!—the affection that—er—er—that I——'

She started to her feet, with a motion so sudden as almost to upset her poor suitor, physically as well as mentally.

'You?' she exclaimed, in a tragic voice, that thrilled him to his marrow. 'Oh, Sir Montagu! for shame!' And then, to the utter completion of his discomfiture, she burst out in a hearty fit of laughter.

Sir Montagu struggled to his feet in silence. In fact, he was altogether bereft, for the moment, of both speech and reason.

'You must pardon my—ah—surprise,' panted she, her enchanting eyes swimming with merriment. She held one hand to her side, while with the other she interposed her bouquet, as a sort of shield, between her amorous assailant and herself. 'The truth is, dear Sir Montagu, I have always accustomed myself to look upon you rather as a father than as a—a——' Here she evinced a tendency to give way to unseemly mirth once more.

Sir Montagu gasped with returning life. Men of his make seldom find it possible to exist long in a state of separation from confidence in themselves.

'Ah—ahem! Yes,' he stammered. 'I

appreciate the delicacy you feel, Pauline. Your friendship with my daughter has led you —misled you, I might say—into ——'

'Oh, not that alone ——'

'Allow me to explain. I did not contemplate bringing home a bride while Gabrielle yet remained with me. But now that her destiny (as you have doubtless heard) leads her elsewhere ——'

'Indeed, I haven't!' broke in the lady. 'On what blessed mortal does she smile?'

'On whom,' rejoined the baronet, with a dignified wave of the hand, 'but her instructor and my *protégé*, Stephen Yorke?'

Pauline blanched for a moment, clutching her roses to her heart, and gazing at Sir Montagu with a dazed, dismayed look. Anon she fetched a deep breath, smiled feebly, and sank back into her chair. 'You are joking,' she murmured.

'By no means!' protested the baronet, who had not perceived the singer's emotion. 'It was yesterday, at the studio, that Stephen——'

Pauline instantly sat erect, and extended her arm with an imperious gesture. '*I* was with Stephen yesterday in the studio, sir,' she cried.

'Er—certainly,' the blind gentleman assented. 'It was, as I was about to state, a few minutes before you came in that ——'

She leant back again, with a short relieved laugh. 'Before! Ah—h! I knew it! . . .

Pardon my curiosity—woman's weakness, you know. What were we talking about?'

'About this proposal of mine,' replied Sir Montagu, with alacrity. 'Dearest Pauline, I firmly believe that you—hem! that neither of us could do better. Do you imagine me unmindful of the disparity of our ages? Listen!' he went on, impressively. 'For every year by which Pauline Gordoni is my junior, I have determined to settle five thousand pounds sterling on Pauline Goldsborough! Have I said enough?'

Pauline let her eye rest on the flowers, which she patted lovingly. 'You make the gift too valuable, Sir Montagu,' she said, quietly. 'No, I cannot accept it. A few roses, any settlement, is all I dare to allow myself.'

'My charming friend! Would you have me take your words seriously?'

'Not too seriously to heart, I hope,' she answered kindly; 'but seriously in earnest. I cannot marry you, Sir Montagu.'

'I cannot accept this decision as final,' exclaimed the baronet, with some agitation. 'Tell me one thing, Pauline—you are not engaged elsewhere?'

She partly concealed her face behind her bouquet as she answered demurely, 'No.'

'Then I'll not take "No" for an answer!' the sturdy wooer rejoined. He rose and held out his hand. 'For the present, I bid you adieu. Keep private what has passed between us, and meanwhile permit our relations to

continue on the same friendly footing as before.'

'Oh, by all means,' returned she, indifferently.

'Adieu!' repeated Goldsborough; and turning at the door, he added, 'Remember, I still hope!'

His departure left the prima donna relieved, indeed, but no longer so cheerful as before his advent. 'Foolish old fellow, with his still hoping,' she said to herself, half angrily. 'Everybody hopes something, though,' I suppose,' she reflected; 'and maybe my hopes are foolish, too! Ah well, I will be foolish, then. How can I be wise since my heart is gone?'

CHAPTER VII.

SPARRING.

How long Pauline's solitude continued she did not know. It was broken at last by the intimation from Annette that the Honourable Ivo Scott was waiting for an audience.

His arrival at this time annoyed Pauline, inasmuch as she had excellent reason to expect the speedy appearance of someone else. She directed that he should be shown in, however, inwardly resolving to dismiss him at the earliest opportunity.

'*Illustrissima!* the top of the morning to you,' he said, with his easy smile. 'You are

as lovely as that aria you sang last night. Stephen's bouquet, evidently!' he added to himself. 'She's in love, no doubt; but with the passion, I fancy, not the man. *Diva*,' he resumed aloud, 'I'll not detain you long.' He seated himself slowly, in obedience to a motion of her hand, and regarded her for a few moments attentively.

'Well,' she said, at length, with a movement of impatience; 'I am waiting to . . . . be detained!'

Scott bowed, and dropped his eyes. 'You won't think me intrusive if I remind you of our long acquaintance—of the great interest I ——'

'My dear Mr. Scott,' interrupted Pauline, with a slightly sarcastic intonation, 'I'm in no danger of forgetting that your influence first introduced me to the London public.'

'I refer to no such slight service, *illustrissima*. . . . You know my sincere affection for Stephen?'

Pauline half closed her eyelids for a moment. 'You have told me of it,' she said, coldly.

'Well—I am going to risk your friendship and his by doing you both the greatest service in my power.'

'Really? That sounds suspiciously ——' She paused.

'Suspiciously what?'

'Philanthropic!'

Ivo laughed somewhat laboriously. 'I'll

try to be only diplomatic, then,' he said. 'But, to be frank, my mission is one of extreme delicacy, and ——'

'Mr. Scott,' said Pauline, with an access of imperiousness, 'to the point at once!'

'Be it so. Stephen fancies he loves you. He told me as much.'

'Was he so much in need of a confidant?'

Ivo passed over the sneer, and continued. 'I pointed out to him his folly.' She started and frowned. 'Hear me to the end,' he said. 'I reminded him that Gabrielle had been taught to regard him as her future husband: that on all accounts the match would be a desirable one: that you and he, on the contrary, had but temporarily dazzled one another.'

'There is no need, that I can see, to spin this matter out,' interrupted Pauline again, with ominous composure. 'It lies in a nutshell. You assert that Mr. Yorke and I don't know our own minds, whereas you are intimately acquainted with both. I might remind you that, although you appear to have gained his confidence, I'm not aware of having yet given you mine. But no matter about that. What I am dying with curiosity to know is, your motive for making the assumptions and taking the liberties you have done. You have yourself, you know, been regarded as Gabrielle's suitor. Now, are you surrendering her to your rival because she loves him better than she does you? or because he can make

her happier than you could? or what is the answer to your conundrum, Mr. Scott?'

Ivo met this attack with an aspect of sad and dignified rebuke. 'Pauline, I have never aspired to the honour of Miss Goldsborough's hand. You are hardly just. My sole object has been the welfare of my two dearest friends.'

'Well, you have surprised me, I must confess,' said she, with one of her unexpected but always melodious laughs. 'Now it is my turn! Just before you came in I had received an offer. . . . a fortune larger than I could hope to make myself . . . . with a hand and heart thrown in! What do you think of that?'

Scott felt that he was turning pale; but he could not help it; it taxed all his powers to maintain his facial immobility. 'Goldsborough, by all that's monstrous!' he groaned inwardly. 'There's a feminine revenge! Since she can't make Stephen happy as his wife, to make him miserable as his mother-in-law! She's capable of it, too!'

'On the other hand,' Pauline went on, taking a letter from the table, 'here is the American impresario proposing liberal terms for a tour in the United States. Now, I ask you, as a friend, which of these two offers ought I to accept?'

'The American, by all means!' exclaimed Ivo, with less than his usual forethought.

'You surprise me again,' said Pauline, leaning forward with an air of malicious in-

terest. 'Would not my marriage with another leave Stephen as free for Gabrielle as if I went to America unmarried? Is an ocean between us indispensable to his serenity?'

'It's indispensable to mine, at all events!' muttered the diplomatist, half aloud. 'Pauline, I won't attempt to disguise it from you—it is not on Stephen's account only that I counsel you to go to America. I have a—a more personal interest in it than that.'

At this critical moment Pauline rose from her chair and laid her finger to her lips.

'Hark!' she said; 'I think someone is coming.' She touched the bell. 'Annette,' she continued, as the maid appeared, 'whoever that is that has just arrived, let him come in!' And having administered this crushing blow, she smiled innocently upon the Honourable Ivo Scott, and quietly resumed her seat at the table.

It was Colonel Sparks who had been selected by destiny to interrupt the diplomatist's avowal. He entered with the grave self-possession of an eighteenth-century French marquis, and made the prima donna an obeisance so profound as to inform her that his hair was parted behind as well as down the middle.

'Good morning, mademoiselle,' he said. 'I dropped in to ratify our little affair. Ah! the Honourable Mr. Scott, I believe. It gives me pleasure, sir, as the representative of American journalism in the old country, to congratulate you on your recent appointment

to Washington. Allow me to take you by the hand.'

The First Secretary responded politely. Though staggered by Pauline's rebuff, he was not defeated, feeling as he did that he still had the best of the game in his hands; and he had immediately reflected that the Colonel's cause was, so far as it went, his own also.

Colonel Sparks now seated himself at the other side of the table, and produced a large memorandum-book. 'You received my letter this morning, mademoiselle?' he inquired, glancing across. She bowed.

'Well, you see, it amounts to about this. My folks in New York, who are running the Grand Opera and Concert Combination Troupe through the States this fall and winter, have authorised me, as their agent here, to engage the biggest prima donna on earth for the leading *rôles*. Need I add, mademoiselle, that you are the lady we are after?'

'This is most flattering,' returned the Gordoni, graciously. 'But if bigness be a stipulation, Colonel Sparks, there is in London a prima donna even bigger than I, who——'

'I expect you refer to Frangipani,' returned the Colonel, allowing himself a smile. 'Well, she would have the call of you if pounds avoirdupois were in question, and no mistake. But no, mademoiselle; we don't look at her, or anyone else, if we can get you.'

Gordoni appeared to consider for a moment,

and then, to Ivo's secret astonishment, she said, 'I have only one question to ask—what are your terms?'

'I like that!' exclaimed the Colonel, rubbing his hands and nodding his head sideways at Ivo. 'Eh, Mr. Scott? I like a lady who can talk money! Our terms, mademoiselle, are as follows:—For one hundred appearances in opera and concert, one hundred thousand dollars. That is twenty thousand pounds British money. In addition, you receive full travelling expenses for self and maid; and a draft for two thousand pounds down on account. Does that seem about right?'

'What does the Secretary of Legation think of it?' she inquired, glancing at him languidly.

'His most avaricious dreams would be content with a fifth as much,' answered Ivo, crossing his legs and wondering what was coming next.

The Colonel permitted himself another smile. 'We First Secretaries and New York correspondents aren't so scarce, Mr. Scott,' he remarked; 'and we don't draw.'

'Except on our imaginations,' the diplomatist murmured.

'Well, now, mademoiselle,' continued the Colonel, unfolding a large document and spreading it out on the table, 'if you will kindly sign this agreement, and endorse this draft, I'll be off and get your ticket for New York. There's no time to lose, if I may be allowed to say so.'

'Lose none on my account, Colonel Sparks,' replied Pauline, bending over her flowers for a moment, and then looking up at him quietly. 'I shall not go to New York.'

The Colonel's face wrinkled incredulously. 'Refuse our offer!'

Ivo had risen and passed behind Pauline's chair. 'For Heaven's sake think what you are doing!' he exclaimed, in a low but earnest tone. Her only answer was to rise from the table and stand as if in intimation that the audience was over. Ivo bit his moustache. 'If I told her of that scrape of her brother,' he thought, 'she'd sign at once. . . . No, hang it! I must try to spare her that.'

'The fact is, Colonel Sparks,' said Pauline, coolly, 'your offer is liberal, but it does not tempt me to leave England. Madame Frangipani ——'

The Colonel shook his head despondently. 'Frangipani be. . . . I'll tell you what, mademoiselle,' he exclaimed, getting to his feet and buttoning his coat resolutely. 'I'll step round to the telegraph office and wire to my folks at New York to raise the terms. We'll have you, if it costs a million.'

'It will be of no use, I warn you,' returned Pauline; and now the colour began to deepen in her cheeks, and her eyes to sparkle. She had been baited long enough.

'Make no final decision, I entreat you!' said Ivo at her ear. 'I have other arguments ——'

She turned upon him haughtily, measuring

him with her eyes. 'Mr. Scott,' said she, 'I will not be argued with.'

The Colonel touched Ivo on the elbow. 'When you see a prima donna in that humour, sir,' he whispered confidentially, 'you may make up your mind that cash down is worth all the arguments in the world. I mean what I say, sir; and in less than half-an-hour I expect to give you a proof of it.' So saying, the gallant gentleman bowed and went away hastily. He ran into another gentleman who was just coming in: a tall, broad-shouldered personage, with large, deep-set eyes, and firm but generous lips. 'Who may he be, I'd like to know?' questioned the Colonel to himself, as he ran down-stairs; and being a practical person, he repeated the question to the servant who let him out of the door.

'Stephen Yorke, eh? Now, what can he be after?' meditated the American, as he whirled along to the telegraph office in a hansom.

CHAPTER VIII.

A HIT.

Scott had moved to one side when Yorke entered, so that the latter did not at first see him. He came up to Pauline, and grasped her hands with heartiness. The roses, which she had hitherto clung to through all vicissitudes, now slid unheeded to the floor.

'You look pale,' he said, tenderly.

'Mr. Scott, you are not going?' she inquired, with polite significance.

Yorke relinquished her hands and turned. 'Ivo, I didn't see you.'

'How d'ye, old boy,' returned the diplomatist. 'Yes, *diva*, my mare's waiting; but I shall step in again on my way back from the office; and, of course, we shall meet at Goldsborough's garden-party this afternoon. So, *au revoir!* This will be a dangerous interview,' he thought, 'but, hang it! they can't marry.'

'So you got my roses,' said Yorke, picking them up, with a smile.

'Oh, my poor flowers!' she exclaimed nervously, holding out her hands for them. 'I have been wondering,' she added, after some hesitation, 'what you could have to say to me since yesterday. Anything about the portrait?'

'The portrait doesn't satisfy me. It's a picture of your features, but it isn't you. But since my glimpse of you at the theatre last night, I have more than ever realised that my life is a very imperfect affair.'

'Imperfect?'

'Because it's a solitary life.'

'But you are to remedy that soon, you know,' said Pauline with increasing nervousness. 'Sir Montagu was here this morning and told me ——'

'Well? What did Sir Montagu tell you?' demanded Stephen, smiling.

'He hinted at your engagement to Gabrielle.'

'What?' cried Stephen, with a voice like an organ.

'So now we must exchange congratulations,' she went on hurriedly, 'for you are to congratulate me, too.'

'What?' repeated Stephen, dropping his voice to the key of bewilderment.

'On the eligible offer of marriage I received just now,' she continued, in a tone that wavered on the border between laughter and tears. It was delicious to her to see the consternation into which her words were plunging Stephen, while at the same time her heart reproached her for causing him needless pain. Yet she felt impelled to struggle against his love, if only to assure herself for ever of its overmastering strength.

'Who offered you marriage?' he demanded, after looking intently at her.

'I promised not to tell; but no matter, for I had to tell that person that I was already engaged to someone else.'

'I don't understand,' said Stephen simply, leaning back in his chair.

'You know—to go to America.'

'Oh, is that all? Well, you are not going to America,' said Stephen, feeling immensely relieved.

'Indeed, it's all arranged; there are the papers on the table; the agreement only wants my signature.'

'Well, it will never have it,' rejoined he, with rising good-humour.

'Why not? I shall make a fortune in six months.'

Stephen drew his chair round to hers, and leaned over towards her. 'When I gathered these roses this morning,' said he, touching the flowers with his hand, 'I was thinking of what we were saying to each other yesterday. It was not in this humour, Pauline, that you parted from me last night.'

'I must forget yesterday, and so must you,' she answered, beginning to breathe faster. She glanced at him, and then, feeling the certainty that her words would be in vain, she spoke more boldly. 'It was only a dream that we had . . . . a sort of fool's paradise that never was meant to be realised. We must not think about it any more. Obligations and honour stand in the way.'

'Obligations and honour!' he repeated, with some scorn. 'What sort of new language are you talking? Those are not your words, nor your thoughts. My only obligations are to you; my honour is yours—and my love ——'

'No, Stephen . . . . you must not say——'

'I say,' he exclaimed, kindling, 'that my love is yours; no other woman has ever had or ever will have it. My darling, I love you! Be my wife.'

Pauline felt that it would be impossible for her to hold out much longer. To do so at all

was to keep heaven at a distance for the sheer luxury of imagination. To yield would be sweet; but in her heart she had already yielded, and to be wooed like this was sweetness superadded.

'I am afraid, Stephen,' she said, in a very mild tone, 'that if you had never met me you would have married Gabrielle.'

'If I had not met you I never should have married at all,' he answered, with profound conviction.

'But, Stephen . . . . don't you think you may be mistaking infatuation for love? When I am far away in America you will forget me.'

'I will not answer you—you are not speaking from your heart!' he said, almost indignantly. 'Be yourself, Pauline; I am too much'—his voice trembled—'in earnest to bear anything else. I am not a love-sick boy—I am a man, and I love you with all the strength of a man. I can do nothing . . . . my life would fail without you. If you love me, you will consecrate and ennoble it. Come to me!'

Pauline stood up, tearful, smiling, tremulous, brimming over with love and beauty. Stephen rose also, but with a vague alarm in his heart. She was so intensely desirable to him as to make it seem always possible that he might lose her.

'Stephen,' she said, in a voice all uneven and vibrating, but with a dance of happiness underneath, 'there is one thing I want to tell

you that I have not told you. I don't think you have ever suspected it.'

'Well?' was all he could say.

'Well, then . . . . but promise that you will believe this, Stephen—that you will never doubt it for a moment!'

'Yes, I promise.'

'It is only that—Stephen Yorke—I love you ten . . . . hundred . . . . thousand times more than you can possibly love me!'

Stephen gave a sort of low shout as he caught the lovely woman in his arms. Now she was laughing and sobbing on his shoulder; it all seemed too deliriously blissful to be true. Was it true? Poor Stephen! There was something else true that would speedily make this truth appear like the saddest of all pain.

While the lovers had thus been arranging their affairs according to the impulses of their own loving hearts, Colonel Sparks and the Honourable Ivo Scott were both on their way—the former from the telegraph office, the latter from Whitehall—to the little red-brick house on Campden Hill. Both had important matters on their minds. The Colonel was the first to arrive. His outward gravity of demeanour was even more marked than usual; but this was because it was a gravity conditioned upon inward exultation. His telegraphic correspondence had had a satisfactory issue; and he was enjoying, at one and the same time, the patriotic or professional gratification of success in his mission, and the more

private and personal, but not less natural, complacency consequent upon the imaginary handling of a handsome 'commission.' All this, to a man of the world like the Colonel, was sufficient to justify his assumption of the countenance of a prosperous undertaker. Concerning Gordoni's assent to his revised proposals he entertained, of course, not the shadow of a doubt.

'I have communicated with my folks on the other side, mademoiselle,' he said, 'and they have wired back an answer which I expect you will find satisfactory.' He unfolded the telegram and read as follows. '"Tell Gordoni we see that twenty thousand pounds and go ten thousand pounds better." Shall we take it that that settles the bargain, ma'am?'

'I am really very sorry that you have taken all this trouble, Colonel Sparks,' said Pauline, blushing and smiling. In fact, so charitably disposed towards all the world had her new-found happiness made her, that if she could have made the American tour consistent with staying at home and being married to Stephen, she would have signed the agreement on the spot. As this seemed not feasible, however, she was constrained to add: 'I'm afraid I must say "No" again, after all. But I am sure Madame Frangipani will suit you a good deal better.'

The Colonel's jaw relaxed. 'How?' he exclaimed falteringly. 'Do I understand you to say that you go back on thirty thousand

pounds, first-class travelling expenses for self and maid, and—well—say five thousand pounds down?' He might have added a lament on the subject of his lost commission, had he not been too high-toned a gentleman to betray that sort of solicitude.

'Mademoiselle Gordoni's refusal is final, sir,' interposed Yorke, stepping between the Colonel and his quarry. At this juncture Ivo appeared in the doorway.

'I'll tell you what, mademoiselle,' exclaimed the Colonel, playing his last card, 'make it ten thousand down and say no more about it!'

'Ah, Colonel, still true to your logic, I see,' remarked Ivo, sauntering forward. But his eyes went past the discomfited agent, and rested searchingly on Pauline. Meanwhile Stephen took the American by the arm and drew him aside to the window. 'I'll give you valid reasons for this lady's decision,' said he.

Ivo approached Pauline. 'What have you done?' he asked, gravely.

'I have given myself to Stephen!' she answered, with a noble gesture of the head and hands.

'All my persuasions were useless?'

'I love him!' said she, as if nothing could prevail against that argument.

'And yet you will never marry him,' rejoined Ivo, in a low determined voice.

Pauline gazed at him a moment in astonishment, and then gave a little defiant laugh.

But the strange expression of Ivo's face presently had its effect upon her. Her laugh died away. 'Will you tell me what you mean?' she demanded, sharply. 'What is the matter.'

'It's an ungracious task to fulfil,' he said, looking away and pulling off his glove. 'But you have left me no choice; it must be done, and there's no one but me to do it, Pauline.' He faced her doggedly. 'You know that miserable secret that oppresses Stephen?'

'He told me about it yesterday. What—is that all?'

Ivo shook his head. 'No, no,' he said, sadly; 'I am coming to it. Stephen's earnest wish to stand face to face with the man who betrayed his sister. . . . Stephen will kill that man.'

'Why do you speak of these unhappy things?' she broke out, in sudden passionate resentment. 'What have they to do with my happiness?'

'I found the man yesterday,' said Ivo, sternly. 'Hush! Stephen must not know,' he added, laying his hand upon her arm, as she glanced instinctively towards her lover. He whispered the remaining words in her ear: 'The betrayer of Stephen's sister is Percy Gordon, your ——'

She turned quickly pale. 'It is false!' she said, faintly; and she appealed to him piteously, 'Say it is false, too! Heaven would not permit it.'

'Hush! Control yourself!' muttered he. 'I tell you the truth.'

'Then he must remedy the wrong—he shall marry her!' she said, with a wild look.

'He is about to marry another woman.'

'Oh, I cannot bear it,' she said, with a helpless moan.

'Why, Pauline, what has happened?' exclaimed Stephen, who had just finished his explanation with the Colonel. He came up to her like a lion, and put his arm round her waist. 'My dear. . . . My darling. Tell me!'

She turned her face towards him for a moment, with a yearning look and a smile, and a loving, inarticulate murmur. Then slowly her features assumed a hard, expressionless aspect. She freed herself from his embrace by a strengthless but resolute effort. Standing alone, she stared this way and that in a dazed way, as if she were suddenly awakened from a deep sleep. But presently she summoned all her energies and moved to the table.

'Colonel Sparks,' she said, in a flat, sluggish voice, 'the agreement . . . the agreement—I wish to sign it.'

'Pauline, my love,' said Stephen, with tender anxiety, 'you are ill—you don't know what you are doing. I'll call your maid, and send these others away.'

'You are all wrong . . . let me alone!' she answered, with a shudder. 'I have

changed my mind—I cannot marry you.' Her hand groped over the table and found a pen. 'Colonel Sparks—gentlemen,' she continued, looking up vacantly, 'you are witnesses that I sign this agreement to go to America.' She bent down and wrote her name at the bottom of the paper. Having done so, she rose to her full height and flung out her arms.

'You are witnesses ——' she repeated. Darkness came before her eyes; she tried to reach a chair, but faintness overcame her: Stephen caught her as she dropped backwards.

Colonel Sparks, after carefully drying the signature, folded up the agreement and put it solemnly in his pocket. Then he looked at the unconscious prima donna and sighed.

'I understand women considerably well, Mr. Scott,' he remarked to that gentleman, buttoning up his coat and taking his hat in his hand. 'They are all more or less one thing. I thought I had just lost this one: I almost wish I had! but it was not to be, sir. No, it's just as I told you—cash wins every time! Good morning.'

CHAPTER IX.

TWO WOMEN.

SIR MONTAGU GOLDSBOROUGH'S villa at Putney was a capital place for a garden party: the grounds abutted on the river, and in addition to the

well-kept lawns and winding paths common to English gardens, they contained a fine growth of old trees. The house itself was of composite architecture, but roomy and picturesque, especially where, on the garden side, the improvements which the baronet had introduced could not be seen. The back drawing-room windows opened on a wide stone balcony, heavily draped with climbing roses and other leafy vines, and from which a flight of stone steps with high carved balustrade descended to the lawn. On this balcony, at about four o'clock in the afternoon, Gabrielle, in a pretty summer costume, was plucking flowers and making them up into a little nose-gay. The expected guests had not yet begun to arrive. She was in a thoughtful mood, and occasionally she paused in her occupation and lapsed into reverie.

'My dear,' said the voice of Sir Montagu from within, 'my dear! Where are you? I wish to speak with you.'

'Here I am, papa,' she answered, not turning her head.

'Ah!' said the baronet, emerging through the window in all the splendour of a black broadcloth morning coat, grey gloves and trousers, and a large white flower in his button-hole. 'Ah! there you are. Since speaking with you I have called to mind one or two minor items. You are aware that the Marquis of Paddington has kindly promised to be present this afternoon, and I wish you to make

Grigson understand that when he arrives his name must be announced with—er—emphasis.'

Gabrielle arched her eyebrows. 'Certainly, papa,' she answered, demurely, 'with an emphasis on the "marquis;" I understand.'

'And—er—as this happens to be his lordship's first visit, you will, of course, see that his lordship is introduced only to the right people. Ivo Scott his lordship knows, and Stephen Yorke also. Gordoni is coming, of course?'

'I suppose so—she has accepted.'

'And, my dear, I desire you to be especially civil to—er—er—to the American officer. His pen may be of infinite use to me in financial operations.'

'Am I to introduce him to the marquis?'

'That is perhaps not altogether necessary. You may, however, apprise him of the fact that his lordship is present; and contrive that he sees the pictures and—er—er—the service of plate in the dining-room, and all that sort of thing.'

'Make your mind easy, papa,' said Gabrielle, with her ironic little smile. 'I will put your best foot forward for you in everything. Meanwhile, I think you had better be in the front of the house, in case anyone should arrive.'

'There goes the bell, now!' the baronet exclaimed, shooting down his wristbands and giving a glance at his boots. 'Possibly it may be Gordoni. Be on the alert, my dear, be on the alert!' And with that injunction he bustled off.

'I wonder, now,' said the young lady to herself, 'whether my beloved parent has not been offering himself to Gordoni this morning? He certainly seemed rather preoccupied at lunch. Can she have accepted him? Or, rather, can she have refused him? And if so, for whom? I must find out, and quickly too. —Oh, Mr. Scott!'

'A nineteenth-century Juliet!' exclaimed the diplomatist, gallantly. He had strolled round the corner of the house, intending, perhaps, to have a cigarette and a few minutes to himself. 'What a jolly old balcony! and what a lovely bouquet. Ah me! I know I am unfashionably early, but my stay in old England is so short that I must make the most of what is left.'

'It is true, then, that you are going away?' the young lady inquired, pensively.

'Yes, fair lady. I have got the Washington appointment at last.'

'Oh dear! Then you are going for good?'

'For good? Well, in the hope of bettering myself, at all events.'

'And when do you come back?'

'At Her Majesty's pleasure!'

'Oh! I thought only lunatics were detained "at Her Majesty's pleasure"!'

Ivo laughed. Then he became graver. 'Perhaps I am a madman to go!' he muttered.

'Then—don't!' said Gabrielle, glancing in his eyes for a moment. Before he could

answer, she went on, 'Have you seen Gordoni this morning?'

'Gordoni? Ye—es,' replied the diplomatist, as if the matter had nearly escaped his recollection. 'Sir Montagu was there too, I fancy.'

Gabrielle was silent for a few moments. At length she said, in a nonchalant tone: 'By the way, do you know whether Gordoni has really taken that American engagement?'

'Colonel Sparks assures me that she has: and as he showed me her signature to the agreement, I suppose he is right.'

'She could not have accepted a better engagement, I'm sure,' observed Gabrielle, charitably. 'All her friends must be glad—except, perhaps, Mr. Yorke!'

'And pray what should prevent Mr. Yorke from being glad too?' demanded Ivo, with a curious look.

'You know very well that he wants to marry her.'

'You ought to have the best of reasons for knowing that Stephen will do no such thing,' returned Ivo, deliberately. 'For my part, I had expected, before leaving England, to congratulate him—and you—on having made a much better match!'

'Then, if I were Her Majesty, I would certainly not entrust you with a diplomatic post on the other side of the Atlantic!' She came down the steps as she spoke, with the little nosegay between her fingers. On the

step above that on which Ivo was standing she stopped, looking with arch gravity in his face.

'And why would you be so unkind as that?' he inquired, with a feeling that Sir Montagu Goldsborough's daughter was a very pretty and clever girl.

'I should not be unkind,' rejoined she, slipping the flowers through Ivo's button-hole, 'but I should know that, since you can neither see nor comprehend what is directly before your own eyes, here in England, you could not be a safe person to be sent abroad. I should keep you strictly under supervision: so you see you may be very glad that I am not Her Majesty, but only . . . . me!'

'But, Miss Goldsborough—Gabrielle!' exclaimed Ivo, as she turned and ran up the steps again. She turned, with a smile and shake of the head, at the window, and then vanished through it. Ivo, left alone, looked down at his button-hole, looked up at the vacant balcony, thrust his hands into his pockets, and, turning sharply on his heel, sauntered over to a garden seat beneath a neighbouring tree, where he seated himself and lit a cigarette. 'By Jove!' he said, half aloud, several times. Beyond a doubt, Gabrielle was a very pretty, clever, sympathetic little lady. How much so, he had never fully realised until now.

By-and-by Yorke appeared on the balcony, and on seeing Ivo he immediately came down the steps and walked up to him. The expression he wore was not reassuring. 'Ivo, I

want a word with you,' he said, sitting down on the other end of the seat.

'My dear Stephen,' returned the diplomatist, calmly, 'I make it a rule never to have words with a friend. Will you try a cigarette?'

'Let us be sure we are friends, in the first place,' Stephen retorted, rejecting the proffered peace-offering with a gesture.

'Oh, nonsense, Stephen! I can understand that you are ruffled—bitterly disappointed, if you like: but why should you quarrel with me?'

'I don't pick quarrels; but you owe me an explanation, and I mean to have it!' replied Yorke, with a good deal of emphasis. 'Pauline Gordoni promised this morning to be my wife. Ten minutes afterwards, after a few words from you, she broke her word to me. Explain that!'

'My dear Stephen, I have been against a marriage between you and Pauline from the first. My reasons are known to you: well, I made them known to her.'

'There is something behind this. It was in the teeth of your sophistries that I won Pauline this morning.'

'But since then, as she herself told you, she has changed her mind.'

'I ask you to explain that change.'

'Confound it, you ask an impossibility!' exclaimed Ivo, with a show of impatience. 'Who can explain a woman? Colonel Sparks thinks he can! I know I cannot. But just look at the matter coolly. Here is a

great prima donna—who may have had any number of previous love-affairs—meets the great painter Stephen Yorke. Jaded with the world's flattery, she finds in you a deep heart and a sincere mind: it's a new sensation to her, and she at once mistakes it for love; for to be in love is the proper condition of all genuine women. You respond. She at last perceives she has gone too far, yet is loth to prove herself a flirt; and only at the final moment does she muster resolution enough to—to do what she has done.'

Stephen listened with bent brows: but when Ivo had concluded, he shook his head. 'You are not saying what you believe,' he declared bluntly. 'Pauline Gordoni is as honest as daylight. Come, speak out! we are man to man!'

In making this latter assertion, Stephen was in so far mistaken that the words were overheard by other ears besides those of his immediate interlocutor. Gordoni herself had just come out upon the balcony. She remained motionless at the head of the steps, partly overshadowed by the woodbine sprays, yet not so much so but that the two men might have seen her had they turned their eyes in that direction. But they were too busy for that.

'Has it ever occurred to you that you are surprisingly selfish?' was Ivo's answer to Stephen's appeal.

'In what respect selfish?'

'In that you have no eyes for anybody's

sensibilities but your own. For instance, I have known Pauline almost as many years as you have months; did it never dawn upon your mind that she may have fascinated me as well as you?'

At this attack Stephen blenched visibly. Strange as it may appear, the contingency to which Ivo drew his attention was utterly novel to him. He had never imagined his diplomatic friend even capable of loving any woman; he had seemed too courteous and self-possessed for that. Herein, therefore, Stephen's sense of justice pronounced himself remiss; but it did not blind him to the fact of a certain crookedness in Ivo's behaviour. 'If you loved Pauline,' he said, after a pause, 'you should have let me know it at the time I gave my confidence to you. Instead of that, you hid it from me, in order, as it seems, to get me at advantage. That's not my notion of friendship, or even fairness.'

'Not too fast, Stephen; you are unreasonable. I was not called upon to confide my secrets to anyone; but I could hardly have spoken more plainly on the matter than I did to you.' It was to Ivo's credit that, feeling he had the shady side of the argument, he nevertheless kept his temper.

'I was not enough of a diplomatist to understand you,' Stephen replied, with a kind of gloomy sarcasm. 'But, let that pass. I suppose you are not going to tell me that Pauline has—has—encouraged your addresses?'

This nettled Ivo somewhat. 'She has not accepted me,' was his answer; 'but she has

done what might be considered a first step in that direction—she has rejected you!'

Stephen got up. 'I have given you a chance to explain yourself,' he observed, 'and you have only beaten about the bush. If you have acted according to your ideas of right, they are different from mine. But Pauline can tell the truth; and I shall go from you to her. If she is here, I will see her before I go.'

'Go, then, and my blessing accompany you!' exclaimed Ivo, giving way at last to his irritation. 'I give it up! Goodness knows, what I have done has been a great deal more for Pauline's sake than for my own—as you may be sorry to acknowledge some day. I am a better friend to you than you deserve, and, as a final proof of it, I advise you to go home as fast as you can, pack your traps, and start for South Africa. If you force an interview on Pauline, you will be doing more mischief than you can remedy.'

'I will see her,' returned Stephen doggedly, 'whatever happens.'

Meanwhile, Pauline had plenty of time to reflect upon the course she would pursue; and she entered upon it without further delay. As Stephen turned to ascend the steps, he beheld her within a few yards of him, and advancing with a countenance which was pale, indeed, but bore signs neither of flurry nor anxiety. 'Hallo!' muttered Ivo, rising to his feet, 'here's a scene! I wonder what on earth she's going to do now.'

'Good afternoon, gentlemen,' said Pauline, who was dressed from head to foot in white, and carried a parasol upside down by a carved ivory handle. 'Am I interrupting a private conversation?'

'Far from it; it is to you I wish to speak,' answered Stephen, regarding her with a gaze that sought to read her thoughts. But she had thrown herself with her whole heart into her part, and was determined that her thoughts should not be read.

'Is it about anything in particular? If neither of you are going to offer me a seat, I shall take it without asking,' she added, suiting the action to the word, and opening her parasol. 'I feel awfully tired. Mr. Yorke—or you, Mr. Scott, if you will be so good—just step inside and bring me a glass of lemonade.' When he was gone she turned to Stephen, with an engaging smile. 'Now, Mr. Yorke, if you can find room here beside me, we can chat at our leisure. We ought to be quite sentimental, for this is our last meeting. To-morrow I'm off—ten thousand down, as the Colonel says, and first-class travelling expenses for self and maid!' She finished with a laugh, so naturally done as to make Stephen's blood run cold.

'I want you to tell me the truth about what has happened,' he said, at length.

'The truth? You are becoming dull already! The truth is not sentimental. At least, what is sentimental is not often true.'

'"Are you the same woman you were this morning?'

'In some respects—as far as flesh and bones go—I am pretty much the same, I believe. In some other respects, perhaps not. Why?'

'I mean in your love for me, Pauline.'

'Now, Mr. Yorke!' she said, archly; 'are you in earnest, or are you paying me a compliment?'

'I don't know what you mean by paying you a compliment.'

'Mercy on us! what is the matter with the man? If you are going to be cross, I wish you would go out and talk to somebody else. I want to enjoy my last day in England. I only thought you might be complimenting my histrionic capabilities. As I am technically a lyrical artist, any such recognition would be especially welcome.'

'You are acting now, Pauline,' said Yorke, with a deep impetuosity that shook his voice, 'but you can never make me believe that you were acting this morning. God never made a woman so exquisitely false as that. What is this hateful thing that masks you from me?' He held out his hands, in which the tremor of his passion was perceptible, and added, in a low tone of ineffable tenderness, 'Come . . . come back to me!'

Pauline's lips felt dry, and a sickness crept over her heart that made life itself almost intolerable. Her courage, however, still held out, and not many seconds had passed before

she was able to answer. 'Really, Mr. Yorke, you make my position very embarrassing. I took you to be a man of the world. I certainly never expected that a little harmless flirtation over a portrait would subject me to being hauled over the coals like this. If you were resolved upon taking things seriously, you should have withdrawn in time. I can't be expected to look out for the welfare of all the people who make love to me! I belong to the stage—I have never pretended to be better than any other stage woman. I must have excitement. . . . I dare say I have my share of vanity. I will be perfectly frank with you. I confess that I felt an especial ambition to bring you to my feet. They said no woman had ever moved you. I made up my mind to do what no other woman had ever done. And—if you must have it—I confess also that I came to take such an interest in the comedy as almost to persuade myself it was not make-believe. Yes—I was really rather upset this morning—if that is any consolation to you. So now . . . . shall we cry quits, and shake hands upon it?'

'God forgive us, if this is true!' murmured Stephen, in a low, awe-struck voice. 'But it cannot be true!' he continued, after a moment, with the intense energy of a man at gripes with spiritual death. 'Pauline—darling! I love you I believe in you, I trust you as I trust Heaven! Keep your secret, if you will; but let me keep you!'

'This must end!' cried Pauline, starting to

her feet in a state little removed from delirium. 'Are you a man? have you no pride? I tell you I cannot—I will not! Leave me! You insult me . . . . You trouble me . . . . You tire me.'

Stephen stood aghast. He had fought against this evil belief as one fights for all that he deems pure and sacred; but it was getting too strong for him. He and Pauline, facing one another, formed a strange and tragic spectacle. Ivo Scott, coming slowly down the steps, eyed them curiously and rather uneasily. Stephen was the first to become aware of his presence.

'Ivo,' he said in a husky voice, 'you told me just now that you were this woman's suitor. Is it true or false? There she stands.'

'I must decline to answer,' said Ivo, after a little.

Then Pauline took a sudden and desperate resolution. She came forward and took her place beside the diplomatist. 'Mr. Yorke,' she said feebly, 'your unmanly resistance forces me to do what may seem unwomanly. Mr. Scott has been my friend for many years; he wishes me to become his wife.' She hesitated and faltered, but presently steeled herself again. 'I accept . . . I agree . . . I will be his wife. Is that enough?'

Stephen's lips moved, but no audible words came. He turned round and walked away.

CHAPTER X.

ENGAGED.

THE Honourable Ivo Scott had never felt so thoroughly embarrassed as at that moment, when all for which he had been scheming was put suddenly within his grasp. Pauline, as soon as Yorke was out of sight, moved unsteadily back to the seat, and sank down upon it. She seemed to have forgotten that the man to whom she had given herself was in existence.

'Was ever woman in such humour won!' he thought to himself, looking at her askance. 'By Jove! what an appalling sort of courtship! Humph! she's not the ideal picture of betrothed affection just at present. I suppose one ought to say something. 'Pon my word, I never felt less disposed for conversation. The sensible way would be to let her alone; but that's hardly consistent with the privileges of an accepted lover! I must thank her, at all risks. Pauline,' he continued aloud, 'I appreciate your generosity, believe me!' She sat listless, her face turned from him: he went on: 'If a life's devotion can compensate. . . .'

'Don't speak to me!' she interrupted, in a scarcely audible voice. 'Don't try to understand me. Go—go!'

'If you really wish it, I will leave you, Pauline,' he returned, secretly a little relieved.

'Perhaps, under the circumstances, I'd better not announce our . . . . ?'

She turned upon him savagely. 'Do you wish me to hate you?'

'By Jove!' ejaculated the diplomatist. He bowed stiffly, and sauntered away. Pauline, after a while, laid her face upon her arms and wept unrestrainedly. For some time no one came to disturb her, and what was unbearable of her emotion had the opportunity to relieve itself. At length she sat up, mechanically wiping her eyes with her handkerchief, and wondering to find the sun so bright and the air so soft. It was a strange world!

'Mademoiselle Gordoni!' called a brisk young voice, 'I have been hunting for you everywhere!' Pauline looked up, and saw Gabrielle. 'Everybody wants to see you!' continued that young lady, coming towards her across the grass, with the skirt of her dress in her hand.

'I am so tired of exhibiting myself,' said Pauline, languidly.

'Then you shall do as you please,' returned the little hostess, sympathetically. 'Oh, do you know I'm awfully grateful to you!'

'You?' murmured the other, absently.

'Yes, for refusing him, you know. I'm certain he couldn't have made you happy.'

'Perhaps not, dear. Perhaps you will make him a better wife than I ——'

'A wife!' repeated Gabrielle, puzzled. 'I was talking about papa!'

'Pardon me, dear—I was . . . . half asleep. Your father?' She gave a weary sigh. 'I cannot marry him, Gabrielle.'

'If you don't mind my saying it—I think you and Mr. Yorke are much better suited to each other.'

Pauline shook her head. 'Think so no longer, dear. You must make him happy, not I.'

'Oh, indeed, I shall do no such thing! In the first place, I'm afraid of him.'

'Gabrielle,' said Pauline, rousing herself, 'there was never a heart like his, so deep and so tender. To live under the influence of his mind . . . . child! you will be the most blessed woman on earth when you become his wife.'

The unselfish fervour of the great singer's soul touched the worldly little heart of the banker's daughter. 'Dear Pauline,' she said, affectionately, 'I would as soon think of marrying an Egyptian obelisk as Stephen. I understand the one about as much as the other. I'm not really clever—only rather—shrewd! But you do understand him; you can be happy with great ideas. You don't need to seek distraction in the world and in fashion; any empty-headed woman can do that; but there is only one Gordoni!'

'Ah!' sighed the singer, 'art is glorious, but artists are slaves. My slavery has lasted long enough. The wife of Stephen Yorke will not find life monotonous!'

'But I tell you I don't and can't love him!'

persisted Gabrielle, almost plaintively. 'I want a much less tremendous man!'

'Gabrielle!' exclaimed the other, with a sudden misgiving, 'is it possible you care for—for anyone else?'

Gabrielle coloured a little, and smiled a good deal. 'I think I prefer diplomacy to art,' she said, with the small subtlety that was characteristic of her; 'and I should dearly like to . . . . go to America. Oh, here comes Mr. Scott!'

'Am I doomed to mar all other lives as well as my own?' thought poor Pauline, heartbrokenly.

'Come, this is too bad!' declared Ivo, running down the steps. 'Are you two ladies aware that Society is inconsolable over your absence? There's Lord Paddington inquiring after the *Diva*, the gallant and engaging American searching for Miss Goldsborough, and Herr Something-or-other going to play a violin solo in the drawing-room; not to mention dear papa, who is rushing up and down after everybody! And, as for myself, I am deputed to bring you to the front. Will you come?'

Pauline rose; but at the foot of the steps she dismissed Ivo, who thereupon returned to Gabrielle. 'But don't you want to hear the solo, Mr. Scott?' she inquired demurely, as he took his place on the bench by her side.

'I think a duet is better fun,' he replied.

'Tell me something about America—what are the people like?'

'Hum . . . . You know Colonel Sparks?'

'Are they all like him?'

'More or less, I fancy.'

'And are the women like him, too?'

'I shouldn't wonder.'

'I'm glad of that!'

'Is the gallant Colonel so captivating?' demanded Ivo, with a laugh.

'I mean I shouldn't be jealous of him if he were a woman!'

'Oh! Well, I trust none of the women will be like you.'

'Why?'

'Men's hearts are not marble,' explained he, sentimentally.

'You will enjoy America,' said Gabrielle, with a sigh. 'At least, I should!'

'Really?'

'Society, there, doesn't snub you because your grandfather happened to buy his own coat of arms. I'm tired of making up to great ladies because papa wants to get into society. I should be quite content to be always——'

'To be always what?' asked Ivo, taking one of her hands in his.

She glanced at him sidelong. 'As I am now!' she answered, immediately after withdrawing her hand very gently, and rising. 'I see Mr. Yorke and papa coming this way,' she presently added. 'Are you coming into the house?'

'By Jove! have I been on the wrong tack all this time?' Ivo demanded of himself, as he followed her meditatively up the steps. 'She is deucedly sympathetic!'

CHAPTER XI.

MARRIED.

'No, no, Stephen,' Sir Montagu was saying, 'I will positively take no refusal. I have set my heart on your dining with us this evening.'

'You're very good, but I must get back to town at once.'

'Really? Then perhaps I'd better explain to you now what I had intended—er—introducing after dinner.'

'By all means,' returned Yorke, listlessly.

'It concerns two friends of yours, Stephen,' the baronet began.

'Ah!'

'Pauline Gordoni and—myself!'

'Oh!'

'Now, my dear boy, I want your assistance. You are not, I apprehend, aware that an—er—important modification has just taken place in Pauline's prospects!'

'I know—she's going to America.'

'She's not likely to go so far as that,' said the baronet, with a private chuckle. 'I refer to another circumstance. She's the daughter, I should premise, of Captain Gordon, who was killed at Lucknow, and the niece of Sir Percy Gordon, Bart., of Cedarhurst, Kent. Her brother, and indeed all her relations, cut her after her first appearance as a singer, and she hasn't seen her uncle since she was a child.

Now I am coming to the point. Sir Percy Gordon died late last night: my firm has carried on all the—er—affairs of the Gordons for many years past. The property is not entailed. Young Percy Gordon, whom I believe you have met, was destined by his uncle to marry a Kentish lady of good family, and to succeed to the baronetcy and the estates at Cedarhurst.'

'Well, he does succeed to them, does he?'

'To the baronetcy and a few hundreds per annum—yes. But the estates, my dear boy—the estates are left to Pauline!'

'Rather a strange will!' observed Stephen, after a pause.

'Decidedly so. The fact is, Sir Percy altered his first intention only a few days ago. The youngster, it seems, had got into a scrape a while back—the old story—an idle young fellow and a pretty orphan girl in the Channel Islands——'

'What?' exclaimed Stephen. 'In which island?'

'Er—let me see—I think it was Jersey. Well, of course it was a bad business, the more so as Sir Percy discovered the girl's father to have been a worthy old fisherman, whom he had once met and taken a fancy to on the Northumberland coast.'

Stephen was terribly aroused, but outwardly very quiet. 'Do you know his name?' he demanded.

'Whose name?'

'The old fisherman's?'

'I do happen to remember it, because—er—er——'

'Because what?'

'Because—er—er—an odd coincidence: it's the same as your own.'

'I have found him!' muttered Stephen, drawing a deep breath and moving a step or two apart.

'One can't help feeling for the young man, after all,' observed Sir Montagu, charitably: 'boys will be boys, you know; and this will be altogether a terrible blow for him, for of course it puts a stop to his marriage ——'

'His marriage!' growled Stephen. 'The villain!'

'He desires me to manage his affairs,' continued the unconscious baronet, 'and, as the matter needs talking over, I have telegraphed him to dine here this evening.'

'This evening? Then I'll stay and meet him,' Stephen said.

'By all means do so!' exclaimed the baronet, cordially. 'And, by-the-by, if you would speak to his sister ——'

'His sister. . . . Oh, Pauline!' murmured Yorke, with a pang of remorse in the midst of his revengeful preoccupation. He had not thought of the relationship before.

'Sir Montagu!' called the voice of Ivo from the balcony, 'Gordon is in the drawing-room; he has told me the result ——'

'Arrived already!' exclaimed the baronet.

'Good! I'll fetch him. Here's Yorke is anxious to see him.'

'Hum! no—better not,' returned Ivo, in an undertone. 'There are reasons why they should not meet.'

'Oh, nonsense!' persisted the good-humoured Sir Montagu. 'They have met already; I'll go and fetch him.' And away he went.

Ivo came down, with some unformed plan in his mind to get Yorke quietly out of the way; but, as soon as he saw the expression on the artist's face, he perceived it was too late.

'Ivo I've found the man,' Stephen said, quite composedly, but with a very uncomfortable significance.

'My dear Stephen, remember that you can do nothing here,' entreated the diplomatist, greatly disturbed. 'A private quarrel, however weighty, cannot be explained away in a friend's house.'

'Explained away?' repeated Stephen, with a grim laugh. 'He shall answer me with his life.'

'And publish your sister's shame to the world? You are mad!'

'I am,' replied Stephen, quietly, 'for the first and last time. Ha! There he is.'

'Here, Yorke, here is our young friend, the new baronet,' cried Sir Montagu, as he and Gordon descended to the lawn where Yorke and Scott were standing. Gordon came forward

and offered his hand. Yorke put his behind his back.

'Sir Percy Gordon,' said he, in a tone that all could hear, 'I am happy to have this public opportunity of reminding you that you are a scoundrel.'

Scott bit his moustache, and looked down. Sir Montagu's jaw fell, and he stood utterly dumbfounded. Gordon grew very red, and looked his antagonist squarely in the face. At this juncture Pauline and Gabrielle came out on the balcony, and the former, on perceiving what was going on, ran swiftly down the steps and put herself between the two men.

'Stephen, he is my brother!' she said, defiantly.

'There is no need for any further concealment,' the young baronet observed, bowing gravely to his sister, and looking round on the assembled faces. 'Mr. Yorke, you are hasty, and I do not deserve your accusation. Your sister is my wife.'

At this there was a total silence; but it was a speaking silence. In a few moments an uncontrollable trembling seized upon Stephen, and sweat broke out upon his forehead. Those words 'my wife' went through him like electric shocks. Meanwhile he was aware that Gordon was still speaking.

'We were married in London the day after she left Jersey with me,' the latter said. 'I deceived everyone but her. Knowing that if the report of my marriage reached my uncle's

ears he would disinherit me, I concealed it from him and from all—even from you, Mr. Yorke, who otherwise would have been the first to know it. I can say no more, except that the estates are my sister's; and, Mr. Yorke, I ask your pardon.'

'You have it,' Stephen answered unsteadily; 'but—we will shake hands another time.'

. . . . . .

The party stayed to dinner at Sir Montagu's table; and before the evening was over, there were two pairs of lovers in a very happy and contented frame of mind. Pauline and Stephen had found out that the giving and hearing of explanations was an employment only less inexhaustible than it was agreeable; and Ivo and Gabrielle were interminably absorbed in American speculations. Colonel Sparks took his leave rather early, as he wished to obtain an interview with Madame Frangipani after the opera; and Sir Montagu and Sir Percy made an excuse to retire to the billiard room, where they smoked cigars and talked business until a late hour.

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